

GRIT LAWLESS

F. E. MILLS
YOUNG



~~Amelia S. [illegible]~~

Seattle Wn., 1913.

NOVELS

BY THE SAME AUTHOR

A MISTAKEN MARRIAGE

CHIP

ATONEMENT

SAM'S KID

GRIT LAWLESS

BY F. E. MILLS YOUNG



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I

“THIS job has grown. There has got to be a fourth in it, and the fourth must be a man.— You understand!”

The speaker, who was known as the Colonel, took the cigar he was smoking from his mouth the better to emphasize his words, and looked gravely into the serious faces of his audience. It comprised a man of middle-age, bearded, secretive, calculating; and one other. The other was little more than a boy. By profession he was a mining engineer, by disposition a scamp, ready to plunge into any undertaking that promised adventure. The boy's head was bandaged where recently it had been broken for him, and he sat very quiet and silent, which was unusual; as the Colonel was wont to remark, he frequently talked too much. But he was not proud of his broken head and its consequences, so he held his peace.

“Do either of you know of a man likely to suit? He must be possessed of a good nerve and a none too tender conscience. He'll have to put himself outside the law—the business is outside the law. And he must be a man we can trust.”

The Colonel looked sharply from one to the other of his listeners, but neither answered. The young engineer

was sulkily examining his finger-nails, displaying the same air of detachment that he had shown throughout. He had received so severe a reprimand over the affair of his broken head that he had felt strongly tempted to sever his connection with the Colonel. Only that spirit of adventure that had led him into it, and an unnatural greed of gain, prevented him from cutting the concern.

"I want a man with grit," the Colonel said slowly. "There must be plenty such men in Africa, if I could only put my hand on one."

As he paused the older man looked up suddenly. Something in the Colonel's speech had jerked into his mind a name he had almost forgotten.

"I knew a man once," he said, and hesitated because he was not quite sure whether his knowledge of the man justified a recommendation. The acquaintance had been of the slightest; his opinion of his character was based more upon hearsay than deduction, but he believed it was not at fault.

"Well!"

The Colonel threw in the interjection with sharp impatience, and the other added briefly:

"He might not be sufficiently discreet. I know little of him. . . . I did him a service once."

"What are his qualifications for this job?" the Colonel asked, passing over the half-implied doubt as to discretion. "Let us get hold of facts; we can deal with surmises later."

"Your saying you wanted a man with grit brought him to my mind,—that's what the fellows called him—Grit. And, upon my word! though I suppose I've heard his real name, I can remember him by no other. Nobody ever called him anything else. He was a lean chap, with an ugly scar down one side of his face. I met

him first up in Rhodesia. He was mining then. But I saw him recently in Cape Town."

"How did he earn the name of Grit?" the Colonel inquired, showing an increasing interest; and the boy left off biting his nails and looked up with a half-resentful scowl, as if jealous of the unknown man's qualifications for a mission he knew his chief would not entrust to him.

"I don't know whether he earned it on a particular occasion, or if it was only a general recognition of the chap's pluck. They said of him at the mines that he was a man who did not know fear."

"Pshaw!" The Colonel struck the arm of his chair impatiently with his open palm, and jerked one knee over the other. "I thought you had found me my man," he said irritably, "a man with coolness and nerve. I don't want any braggart with a school-boy hero reputation. Tell me something he has done beside boast of his courage."

The other man smiled. He rolled a cigarette and stuck it between his teeth. Then he struck a match and lighted it.

"I can't tell you much," he said. "I know little of him, but I never heard him boast. He was a reserved fellow with a sort of hard recklessness of manner that gave one the impression that life hadn't used him well. I remember one night, some fellows, in illustration of his almost incredible lack of any sense of fear, telling a yarn of how during one of the punitive expeditions after some native rising—he was in the Cape Police then, or some force, I don't remember the details rightly—several of the boys surrounded a hut in which six of the rebellious ringleaders were hiding. They wanted to take the blacks alive and not lose any of their own men over the business. Grit originated a plan, which

they carried out, very successfully too, foolhardy though the undertaking seemed. He climbed on a comrade's shoulders, dropped through a hole in the grass roof right into the midst of them, and he kept those six armed niggers at bay, fighting with a naked sword and his back against the mud wall. And when the other chaps rushed in they declare he was smiling quietly and seemed to be enjoying himself. He never bragged about it, and he never turned a hair. He simply hadn't felt fear."

"Then there was no particular credit due to him."

"Exactly. Nevertheless, it proves the possession of nerve."

"Oh, dash it all!" the boy, who was called Hayhurst, exclaimed suddenly. "Give the fellow his deserts. It was a damned plucky thing to do."

The Colonel smiled drily.

"It's the kind of hare-brained escapade that appeals to youth."

"Call it hare-brained, if you like. How would you have got at them, sir?" Hayhurst asked brusquely, resenting the other's speech.

"In exactly the same manner, if I could have found anyone fool enough to volunteer."

He pitched the end of his cigar out through the open window and sat up straighter.

"Do you think you could find your man, Simmonds?" he asked. "And if you found him could you persuade him to come and see me here? It would be safer than my going to him. He had better come at night so as to avoid detection. We don't want him to be spotted as in with us at all. If he isn't marked he stands a better chance of success."

"I can find him, right enough," the other answered.

"Then do so with as little delay as possible. You

needn't mention what the job is he will be wanted for, but let him know that however valuable his time is it will be paid for well, and give him thoroughly to understand the necessity for secrecy."

The man addressed as Simmonds nodded without speaking; and the boy, muttering something about a headache, got up, and with a brief good-night passed out through the French window, and swinging himself off the stoep was swallowed immediately in the heavy blackness without. The two men smoked in silence while they listened to the crunching of his footsteps on the gravel path, until the sound died away in the distance and only the stirring of the trees as the fitful wind swept through their branches broke the silence of the night. Then Simmonds looked round sharply at the man who sat near the opening, his strong brows drawn together in a frown of balked annoyance, his eyes still turned in the direction whence Hayhurst had disappeared.

"What on earth induced you to enlist that young fool?" he asked.

The heavy brows contracted yet more fiercely as their owner answered, without moving his position:

"Not such a fool as you fancy. And his youth is—or rather, was—an advantage; it put others off their guard. He was smart enough in getting on to the right trail."

"And then bungled the business, and gave away the whole show."

"Many an older man," the Colonel answered tersely, "has been outwitted by a woman."

He mixed himself a whisky and soda, and talked of other matters until, close upon midnight, Simmonds took his leave.

"Better send your man to me, not bring him," the Colonel said as he was departing,—"safer. And be

careful not to mention what I am likely to want of him. I prefer to judge a man for myself before engaging his services."

Then he wished his companion good-night, and held a lamp for him to light him to the gate.

A few nights later the man whom other men called Grit, the man who was credited with being entirely devoid of fear, presented himself at the bungalow that the Colonel had rented furnished during the owner's temporary absence in England. The bungalow was on the outskirts of Cape Town, and the Colonel had chosen it for its proximity to the city and its lonely situation. It stood back from the road in an ill-kept, overgrown garden that was a wilderness of trees and vine-tangled shrubs and palms. Tall straggling gum trees, with their bare untidy trunks and ill-shaped limbs, towered above the one-storied building and shaded the Dutch stoep built on to the front of the house. Oleanders, pink and white, grew to an immense height, lending their fragrance to the heavily perfumed air, rich with the mingled scents of nicotine and gardenia, and the strong cloying sweetness of the orange tree, the dark green of its foliage starred with the matchless beauty of its blossoms. Date and other palms, the prickly cactus and aloe, grew in a wild confusion; and enclosing the whole, unclipped, neglected, yet glorious in their disorder, were tall hedges of the blue plumbago, whose pale flowers swept the ground.

The Colonel was seated on the stoep when his visitor arrived. He was alone, and thinking about the man though he was not expecting him. The stranger advanced rapidly, with a trained regular step that caught the listener's attention. Instinctively he sat up straighter, and peered forward into the darkness, curious to behold who it was who approached along the winding

path from the gate. When the new-comer stepped into the patch of light below the stoep he recognised him for the man Simmonds had spoken of by the scar on the left side of his face.

He mounted the steps and came on to the stoep, a tall spare man with muscles of iron, the set of whose shoulders suggested, as his footstep had, a military training. He was fair, with a long lightish moustache, a face that was tanned almost copper-coloured, and a pair of dark grey eyes. The eyes were the keenest and the most sombre the Colonel ever remembered to have seen. They were extraordinarily expressive, and yet bafflingly reticent. A woman would have called them beautiful. They conveyed so much of sex, pride, power, of cool aloofness, and at the same time of an almost startling concentration, that their gaze was somewhat disconcerting. The Colonel when he encountered them fully for the first time was conscious of their influence; for quite ten seconds he looked steadily into their inscrutable depths without speaking. Then he tilted the shade of the reading lamp at his elbow the better to see his man, and, perfectly understanding the reason of his action, the stranger advanced a few paces and stood where the light fell more directly on his face.

"I don't know whether Simmonds prepared you for my visit," he said; "but I am here in accordance with your wish."

"Thank you. I am obliged to you for your prompt response."

The Colonel had risen. He led the way into the house through the open window at his back, and carefully closed the window behind his visitor.

"I am fond of trees," he remarked, "but I distrust them. I prefer to hold this interview between walls. We have no occasion to fear the keyholes, for

there is not a soul besides ourselves beneath this roof."

He turned up the lamp as he spoke, and again peered closely at the stranger. By the brighter light in the room he observed the disfiguring scar more clearly. It ran a deep seam slantwise down the lower half of the face. At some time or other a bayonet had slashed the man's cheek open and laid the jawbone bare.

"You've been in the Service?" he said.

"Yes."

The answer, brief, uncommunicative, almost curt, told the Colonel among other things that this man with the ugly scar and the strange unfathomable eyes would brook no catechism in regard to his private affairs. If he wanted his services, he must be prepared to take him on trust. He stared once again into the grey eyes and sat down.

"Take a seat," he said. Then with a motion of his hand to the decanter of whisky that stood on the table between them: "Do you drink?"

The stern mouth behind the heavy moustache relaxed slightly; its owner realised that a negative answer would have been welcomed by his host, who, though he drank himself in moderation, preferred in the present business the services of an abstainer.

"On occasions—yes," he replied as he sat down.

The Colonel pushed the decanter towards him and a glass.

"Help yourself," he said briefly; and the stranger deliberately half filled the glass with spirit and added a dash of soda. His host watched him curiously, and, reversing the quantities, mixed himself a glass.

"The business for which I shall require you, if we come to an understanding," he began, with a formality and stiffness which he had not displayed before, "needs

absolute discretion as well as coolness and courage. I do not doubt for a moment," he added hastily, meeting the piercing gaze of the grey eyes, "that your discretion is equal to your courage. I have heard tales of the latter. They tell me fear is unknown to you. I have heard your courage spoken of in terms of the highest admiration."

The grey eyes smiled suddenly.

"I've heard a lot about that too," their owner said. "It's mostly from youngsters, though."

"My informant was no youngster."

"Ah! you mean Simmonds. His knowledge isn't first hand. He's been listening to the youngsters probably. It doesn't amount to much, a reputation like that."

The Colonel sat back in his chair and sipped his whisky meditatively.

"You disclaim then the reputation you have gained?" he said.

The other shrugged his shoulders indifferently.

"Does any man actually deserve the admiration accorded him?—or the discredit? Such things have their fashion."

"Then, you would not, perhaps, describe yourself as absolutely fearless?"

The man flushed darkly, hesitated for an instant, and then touched the scar on his face deliberately.

"That marks a moment of absolute terror," he said quietly. "Thank God! the fear of being a coward made me receive it in the face instead of the back. Courage is only a matter of control. The hero differs from the coward by the smallest accident of temperament. If self-control were appreciated rightly and made a particular part of the education of the race, the term coward would be seldom applied, and then only to the person it fitted."

The Colonel leant forward suddenly, resting his arms on the table, his glance still searching the thin, inscrutable face that puzzled and yet attracted him.

"It is men like you we want. . . . Why did you leave the Service?" he asked abruptly.

His hearer stiffened visibly.

"Need we go into that?" he said.

"Not if you prefer to keep your own counsel."

There was a barely perceptible pause. The younger man broke it.

"My objection to speak has probably led you to a fairly correct inference," he said. "I was cashiered from the Army. But for which stroke of fortune I should not now be offering my services to you."

He lifted his glass, put it to his lips, and draining the contents, set it down again empty.

The Colonel remained silent, regarding him with freshly awakened distrust. By his own showing the man was an adventurer. Despite his first prejudice in his favour he began to wonder whether after all it were wise to place confidence in him. He knew nothing of him. There was to his credit merely a few garnished tales of daring which, either from modesty or a knowledge of their exaggeration, he had himself practically disclaimed,—and to his discredit the ugly truth he had just heard from his own lips. He sat up suddenly. In the piercing eyes that met his own steadily he perceived the flicker of a smile.

"You haven't committed yourself, sir. There is time to draw back."

But at the half-mocking speech, the almost insolent challenge of the tone, the doubt in the Colonel's mind suddenly vanished. What if the man were an adventurer? Were not his services required for an adventurous undertaking? The balance sheet of his past

life was no concern of his. He wanted courage, daring, and intelligence ; he was prepared to pay for them ; and he believed that the man before him possessed these qualifications.

" You are not the first man who has gone under who in happier circumstances would have been a credit to the Service," he said gravely, and having said it dismissed the subject almost it seemed with relief. It did not do to be over particular in regard to a man's past with great odds at stake.

" I have mentioned what the business I wished to see you about demands of the man who undertakes it," he added, without pausing, " but I have said nothing about the business itself as yet. Briefly, it is the recovery of certain letters and incriminating papers—some of them, I believe, forgeries—that are being now used for the purposes of blackmail."

" Half a moment, please. Is this a personal matter, or are you merely negotiating for someone else ? "

" It is not a personal matter. It affects someone of greater importance. I have been sent out here to get hold of those papers at any cost. We have offered a big sum down for them, but the rogues who hold them won't part. Their game is to keep on squeezing. They believe they have an inexhaustible mine."

" From what you tell me I should say their belief was justified. Since they won't sell, how do you purpose getting hold of the papers ? "

" We must take a leaf from their book and steal them back."

There was a momentary silence during which the grey eyes looked straight into the brown eyes with a hard, unflinching gaze.

" And that's where I come in," he said, completing the Colonel's sentence.

The Colonel nodded.

"That's where you come in—if you do come in, that is. . . . There is a certain danger attaching to the enterprise, but that I needn't mention to you. You will have determined men to deal with, and, unfortunately, men who are in a sense prepared. The plan has been attempted already—and bungled."

"I should like," Grit interposed, "to hear about that, if you please."

The Colonel briefly narrated the story of young Hayhurst's successful tracing of the incriminating papers, of how he managed to get hold of them, and how he lost them again through blabbing of the affair to a woman.

"That woman is in it, take my word for it," the Colonel said.

"What's her name?" inquired the man who had listened quietly to the recital without once interrupting or even moving his position. At the abrupt question the Colonel looked across at him sharply. He had purposely omitted the mention of any names; he intended to secure his man before going into particulars; but now that the question was put to him point blank he felt that he had not sufficient reason for withholding the information.

"Her name is Lawless—Mrs. Lawless, living at Rondebosch.—You know her?" he asked, seeing the unmistakable start his companion gave on hearing the name.

"Know her!—Yes, I suppose I do."

The Colonel did not appear greatly surprised.

"It's likely you would. She is somewhat notorious, I believe."

"In what way?"

"Oh! nothing actually against her that I know of. A beautiful woman living alone, and much admired.

... Rumour has it that she's a widow, and again has it that she is not. I've got beyond the age when a man troubles to find out."

"What causes you to imagine she is in with the other side?" inquired his hearer, a shade of impatience in his tone.

"The boy——"

"Hayhurst?"

"Yes. Hayhurst declares that she induced him to go home with her, that she pumped him, and then signalled to a man who must have been hiding on the stoep, and who sprang in through the window behind him and knocked him senseless with a blow over the head. When he came to himself he was lying in the gutter near his lodging and the papers were gone. My God!" wound up the speaker savagely, "to know that that young fool had in his possession what I've been months scheming to get hold of, and lets a woman Delilah him out of his prize! I could cheerfully have slain him when he brought the tale of his failure to me."

"Lucky for him it was not to me he brought it," the other said grimly; "I should probably have done it. You don't reckon yourself over credulous, I suppose, in accepting his tale as it stands?"

"No. I might have questioned it; but it seems probable enough in face of the fact that the fellow who holds the papers has been paying marked attention to Mrs. Lawless for some time, and she certainly does not discourage him. Cape Town couples their names together, I believe. One can credit anything about a woman who will listen to the suit of a rogue like that, —a damned swindler, with a reputation for being bigamously married already in another country!"

"His name?" the man with the scar asked sharply, leaning half-way across the table.

"Van Bleit."

Grit sat up.

"God! man, I know him intimately. We were in Rhodesia together." He laughed harshly. "It is to him I owe the nickname that has stuck closer than my own. The former acquaintance may prove helpful."

The Colonel peered at him closely.

"You have just reminded me that the nickname is all I know you by," he said. "Simmonds could not recall your rightful title."

"He is not singular in that respect," was the curt response. "My name is Lawless."

The Colonel stared at him blankly, his jaw fallen.

"Lawless!" he repeated, and for the life of him he could not prevent the sudden freeze in his manner. It even occurred to him at the moment that he was the victim of a trick. If so, he had walked into the trap fairly easily.

"It is a somewhat uncommon name," he added. "Are you by any chance related to the lady of whom we have been speaking?"

The man he addressed returned his suspicious scrutiny with careless indifference.

"By marriage only," he answered briefly.

The Colonel was only partially relieved.

"I have confided in you so much, Mr. Lawless," he said, "that you will readily understand how unwelcome this intelligence is. Had I known of the connection sooner I should have hesitated to speak so freely of a matter that is as a sacred trust to me——"

"You need not let what you have just learnt trouble you, sir," the other returned carelessly. "Nothing that you have told me so far would be news to the other side. As for the connection!"—he flicked his fingers scornfully,—"it need weigh with you no more than

that. . . . The lady disapproves of me. We have not met for years."

"Perhaps, though, since a connection of yours is mixed up in this affair you might not care to go on with it. . . ."

"It makes no difference," Lawless answered.

The Colonel reached across the table.

"You are throwing in your lot with me?" he asked quickly.

The other's hand met his.

"I'll get those papers back for you, or I'll kill your man," he said.

II

IT was late afternoon. The sun hung low in the blue sky and shot its beams between the palm slits, making a brilliant tracery on the smooth paths where it pierced a passage between the branches of the mimosa trees, yellow with their golden balls. The chirrup of a cricket was the only sound that broke the quivering silence, save when every now and again the warm wind swept lazily through the gum trees and made music with their leaves.

Looking out upon the sultry stillness of the garden, her pose stiller even than the almost motionless trees, with tense features, and eyes that were stirred with emotion, as the eyes of one who looks back upon the past from the stage of the present, seeing things with the broadened vision of experience, stood the woman of whom the Colonel had spoken in his interview with Lawless. She was tall and dark and splendid, with large brown eyes flecked with a lighter shade as though they held imprisoned sunbeams in their pellucid depths. Her rich dark hair waved back from a low brow that was like ivory in its smooth whiteness, and in the thin lips, scarlet as the flower of the pomegranate, showed her only touch of colour. She wore a white dress of some Indian embroidery, and the plain gold band of her wedding ring comprised her sole ornament.

A clock inside the room chimed the half-hour, and scarcely had the sound died away into silence when the door behind her opened and a native servant showed

a visitor into the room. Mrs. Lawless turned slowly round, and with a hesitating, reluctant step moved forward a few paces and then stood still, her arms hanging motionless at her sides, her lips slightly parted, perhaps in a greeting that never passed them, for she did not speak when she met the straight gaze of the visitor's keen eyes, and looked into the scarred yet still handsome face of the man she had not seen for eight years. He had halted just inside the doorway, and he remained where he was, staring at her, the light falling direct upon his face. The scar showed livid. She gazed at it with fascinated eyes. She had not seen it before.

"It was good of you to consent to see me," he said with grave politeness. "I would not have troubled you with a visit had it not been important. But what I have to say to you could not be written in a letter."

"I quite understand," she answered quietly. "Won't you sit down?"

And in this commonplace manner passed a moment that marked a crisis in two lives.

He waited until she was seated, then he crossed to the window and stood with his back to the sunlit scene.

"I'd rather stand, thank you."

He looked at her uncertainly, looked at the handsome furnishing of the room and frowned. Where had she got her wealth from, this woman whom he had always understood to be poor?

"I did not know," he said slowly, bringing his gaze back to her face, "that you were in South Africa until a few weeks ago. It was a surprise to me. I trust you do not consider it intrusive that I took early advantage of the knowledge to solicit an interview. I would not have done so in ordinary circumstances, but it is a peculiar coincidence that you and I should be mixed up

in the same shady concern. I want you to believe," he added earnestly, "that I had no knowledge of your part in the business of which I am here to speak until after I had volunteered my services. What part you actually played in it I am hoping you will confide in me, and not consider that I am guilty of an impertinence in seeming to interfere in what you do."

"Oh no!" she answered gently, in her rich, deep voice, and added: "I expect it is the affair of that poor boy and the letters you have come to speak about. I always felt that I should hear of it again."

He confirmed her surmise.

"You are suspected," he said in conclusion, "of having assisted in their recapture."

She sat forward on the low sofa upon which she had taken her seat, and, gripping the cushions tightly, questioned him with her eyes.

"Suspected by whom?—You?"

"That question is unnecessary, surely," he replied coldly. "Had I suspected such a thing I should not be here. It is because I want to hit the next man who breathes such a slander that I desire to have from your own lips an explanation of that night's work. Will you tell me all you know of the affair? It may be a help to me in tracing those letters."

"What have the letters to do with you?" she asked.

"That's easily answered," he replied. "I am a soldier of fortune; my hand and brain go to the highest bidder. Personally, I am not interested in this matter—or rather, I was not interested; it has now become a matter of life or death to me. I am pledged to recover those letters,—and I mean to do it."

She released her grip of the sofa cushion, folded her hands loosely in her lap, and looked calmly into his sombre eyes. He thought as he watched her that she

was the most alluringly beautiful woman he had ever seen.

"I did not know," she said slowly, halting between the words. "I haven't been out very long—barely six months; and I had not heard—anything. . . . I will tell you all I know about the letters, though I don't quite understand their importance. It's a case of blackmail, of course—at least, I gathered from Mr. Hayhurst that they were being held for blackmail. He had succeeded in getting hold of them. The boy drinks too much, and when he has been drinking he talks. I met him at a friend's house, and he was talking, boasting of his achievement. He had these most important papers on his person at the time, and was inflated with success, I suppose—and too much wine. I persuaded him to come home with me; and in the carriage he told me so much about the letters that on arriving here I asked him to show me the packet. I intended to induce him to leave it with me until he was sober and more discreet."

"That was very unwise," her hearer interrupted. "He would probably have gone away and blabbed further, with the result that this house would have been broken into during the night. It was a risky thing to do."

"Perhaps you are right," she said. "But I doubt whether I should have succeeded in persuading him. I think I only roused his suspicions as to the honesty of my intentions. And in any case I should not have been allowed to keep them, for he had evidently been shadowed without knowing it. While I talked with him in this room I fancied I heard a sound on the stoep. The window was open. I walked over to it to look out, but before I could reach it, or realise quite what was happening, a man sprang past me into the room.

He struck the poor drunken boy one blow over the head with a stout short stick he carried that stunned him, and I—I was paralysed with terror. I neither moved nor made any sound, until I saw the man coming towards me, and then I suppose I fainted; for I remember nothing more until I came to my senses later and found myself alone."

"And you never communicated with the police?" he said quickly.

"I sent for the police the following day," she explained; "but before the inspector arrived I received a message from Tom Hayhurst asking me not to move in the matter."

She got up and walked with a certain restrained excitement in her movements to the mantel, where she stood, tall and graceful and outwardly composed, with one arm on the high shelf, her face turned away from him.

"There is danger in this undertaking," she said. "I don't like it. Why should a man risk his life to do another man—a stranger—a service?"

"You forget the reward," he said cynically. "The pay is high."

"The reward would be no compensation to a man for the loss of his life."

He laughed bitterly.

"We have only to die once, and no amount of prudence will release us from the obligation."

She faced round quickly.

"The men who hold those letters in their possession are desperate," she said.

"So am I," he answered carelessly. "It's the same on both sides, I imagine—merely a matter of gain."

"It doesn't only amount to that with you," she exclaimed sharply, and her eyes darkened in her pale face.

"No. There are other considerations; but it is not necessary to go into them."

His tone was quietly aloof; it almost seemed that he would remind her his doings were no concern of hers. She withdrew within herself; and for the space of a few seconds there was silence between them. He broke it.

"You did not tell me who the man was who entered your house that night," he said.

"He was a stranger to me," she replied. "I had not, to my knowledge, seen him before."

"It was not Van Bleit?"

"No." She met his eyes steadily. "Why should you suppose it might be?"

"I would warn you against him," he said curtly, "if I might presume to give you advice."

"Thank you," she answered coldly. "I do not think I stand in need of advice. And your warning is quite unnecessary."

He drew himself up stiffly as a man might who realises a rebuff.

"I beg your pardon," he said.

He looked at her fixedly in the pause that followed his brief apology, and his eyes were hard.

"I have heard what I came to hear. It won't be of great service to me, but I scarcely expected to learn more, and I am obliged to you for receiving me. I will now relieve you of the embarrassment of my presence." He bowed to her with formal politeness. "Good afternoon," he said. "With your permission, I will leave by the window. I see a path which leads direct to the gate."

He turned his back towards her and stepped through the aperture on to the stoep. She followed him with her eyes, those beautiful sun-flecked eyes shadowed

with the stirring of memory ; but she made no move to detain him. Not until after he had left her did she remember that she had said no word in parting. She had simply let him go in silence out of her sight—out of her life. He had come into her life that afternoon, a spectre of the past, and, like a spectre, he had vanished, leaving only another memory to add to those that already disturbed her peace.

She stood quite motionless, gazing, not out through the window whence he had disappeared, but at the place where he had stood, and as she gazed it was suddenly borne in upon her that an opportunity had come to her with the presence of this man, and she had missed it. She had travelled nearly six thousand miles for this,—to realise when it was too late that she had missed her opportunity. It happens thus frequently : we refuse to grasp the event when it entails the smallest sacrifice of self. Could she have humbled her pride sufficiently, she might have had this man's destiny in her hands and have fashioned it to brave issues.

She moved forward deliberately and took her stand where he had taken his, with her back to the glowing garden. Save where his foot had pressed the carpet, he had touched nothing ; he had not so much as rested a hand against the window frame. She could have wished that he had touched things so that she might touch them also, and imagine in so doing that she drew near to him. Despite the firmness of her nature, despite the ugly facts of the man's past that were well known to her, she could not crush the love of him out of her heart. The woman never learns to hate the man who has once brought romance into her life. That he had brought romance into the lives of other women this woman who stood in the opening with her hands locked together

knew. The knowledge was torture to her. It wrung her anew each time her thoughts dwelt on it, and they dwelt on it often. Even now, while she stood there with the remembrance of their recent interview vividly impressed on her mind, the sight of the scarred face photographed on her brain with a distinctness that was almost as though she had his image still before her eyes, the old gripping, agonising jealousy, the wounded self-esteem, were tearing her heart as with searing pincers.

This man, who had brought her romance, had come to her with a gift in either hand. While one gift was goodly, the other had been evil; and the evil had spoilt both.

III

MRS. LAWLESS was dining out. She had become the fashion in Cape Town ; no function was complete without her. Hostesses who wished to attract those they could never hope to capture of themselves knew that by adding Mrs. Lawless to their list they could command the most exclusive. Mrs. Lawless had a friend at Government House. A cousin of hers was aide-de-camp to the Governor. In addition she was wealthy, with an intellect above the average, and a beauty that was quite remarkable. The last qualification was sufficient for the male population of Cape Town. It rallied round her like the swarm round the queen bee, and those women who wished to be well considered of their males rallied round her also, and in submitting to an obligation were forced to acknowledge that her charm was undeniable. Though she had many male admirers she made more feminine friends. She did not seek popularity with her own sex from any sense of diplomacy, but because she liked, and got on better with, women. While the men considered her cold, the women found her peculiarly sympathetic.

She had made one close friend in this new country, which was to her still so strange, so alien ; so careless and pleasure-seeking in its social life, so keenly self-seeking in its business methods, and withal so vivid and picturesque and stirring. This friend, brilliant in political and literary circles, and connected with one of the oldest families in the Colony, was of Dutch

extraction. She had married an Englishman, named Smythe; an alliance that had uprooted an old and bitter racial prejudice, not only on her side, but on her husband's. Smythe, the erstwhile rabid anti-Boer, had been heard warmly supporting universal tolerance.

"After all," he would blandly assert, "it is only one world, and one mother for the whole of us. There are bound to be factions in a very large family. But one needn't carry things to extremes."

His theory, however, did not include the natives.

"A nigger's a nigger," he answered, when approached on this point. "He's not a human being; he's a link,—the one that wasn't lost. If any man chooses to call him a brother he's at liberty to do so. Personally, I'd as soon fraternise with a chimpanzee."

There was one Dutchman, however, whom the tolerant Smythe could not swallow, and that was his wife's cousin, Van Bleit. It seemed as though all his former dislike for the entire race had been concentrated into hatred of this one man. He made no attempt to conquer this aversion, because he knew it was something beyond his control, but he did his best to hide it from his wife, whose fondness for, and admiration of, her cousin was a never-ending source of wonder to him.

Van Bleit had a confident, masterful manner that won him an easy way to the hearts of certain women. By nature he was a bully: a few of the women who had fallen prey to the roystering charm of his personality had found this out. But they invariably made the discovery too late; Van Bleit squeezed his victims dry before he revealed his less amiable side. It was usually in making the discovery that they had been drained that they discovered the other thing. If Van Bleit knew how to overcome feminine reluctance with

a masterful manner, he also knew how to shout down feminine recrimination. In cases where shouting alone would not avail, he showed no hesitation whatever in having resource to physical force. The woman who pitted her strength against his came off worse than the victim who suffered in silence, knowing her case to be beyond hope of redress.

Van Bleit had carried on most of his intrigues in Europe. Because Europe, on account of the suicide of an inconsiderate widow who had really cared for him, had become for a time inconvenient as a place of residence, he had brought his handsome body and his evil mind back to the land of his birth ; and was now pursuing with greater zest than he had pursued any of his former conquests the beautiful and wealthy woman who was his cousin's particular friend. And Mrs. Smythe, with the best intention in the world, took every opportunity of throwing them together.

It was at the Smythes' house that Mrs. Lawless was dining on the evening of the day that Lawless called upon her. Van Bleit was there also. He was her dinner partner. It was not a large gathering. Of the half-dozen guests only one was a stranger to Mrs. Lawless, a tall, military-looking man, with iron-grey hair, and an awkward habit of hunching his shoulders which gave them the appearance of being round. After dinner, the hostess, at his request, introduced him ; and Mrs. Lawless, as she acknowledged the presentation and met the intent gaze of the unsmiling eyes, wondered why the name should be familiar while the owner was quite unknown. Then in a flash she remembered where she had heard it before ; young Hayhurst had talked of Colonel Grey in his drunken confidence on the night that the papers had been lost. She understood why he had wished to be introduced ; he was curious to

discover for himself something of the woman whom he believed to be his enemy.

He was summing her up even while he looked at her ; and he was forced to acknowledge with considerable impatience that he too was influenced like any young hot-headed fool by her wonderful fairness and the beauty of her candid eyes. His summary was surely at fault, since, despite the proof against her, he felt that here was a woman to be trusted, a woman who would be loyal to her friends and just to her enemies. He squared his shoulders as though conscious of the awkward hunching habit, and said in his harsh voice :

"I am glad to meet you, Mrs. Lawless. I have recently had the pleasure of making the acquaintance of a kinsman of yours."

He observed the quick suspicion of the look that flashed from her eyes, the sudden reserve that masked her features, changing their smiling indifference to a cold displeasure, and he remembered a sentence that Lawless had uttered which the change in her manner corroborated : "The lady disapproves of me." Good taste should have prohibited his touching on the subject, but in the game he was playing he set all laws at defiance and pushed forward with but the one aim in view.

"A kinsman—of mine !" she echoed, and the soft contralto voice was a little unsteady. He watched her curiously.

"Someone of the same name," he added.

"Oh ! someone of the same name. . . . That's rather a broad claim to kinship."

The change in her tone was unmistakable. Her manner became more guarded, more studiously careless, but the face exposed to the merciless raking of his gaze wore a faintly distressed flush.

"He claimed kinship with you," he insisted, smiling

pleasantly at her, while he pulled at his iron-grey moustache with a large, well-shaped hand. "I can't help feeling he was justified even on the most slender grounds. He was related to you by marriage, so he said."

She looked at him inquiringly.

"By marriage only," he added, unconsciously quoting Lawless.

"Yes!"

Her composure had reasserted itself. The man who watched her felt puzzled to understand what there had been in his tactless speech to cause her embarrassment, what there was in his further speech to relieve the strain. Her disapproval of the man must be fairly deep-rooted when an indirect mention of him caused her distress. She turned the tables while he was thus wondering, and roused dark doubts and anxious suspicions in his own breast as to the honesty of purpose of the reckless adventurer in whom he had confided an important trust.

"You speak of Mr. Lawless," she said quietly. "He called upon me to-day."

"Indeed!"

The Colonel's eyes snapped. He hunched his shoulders, and jerked his big head forward and peered hard at her. Intuition told her what he was thinking. He feared treachery. Distrust grew in him, distrust of the man for whose services he was paying,—the man who was connected by marriage with this woman who had tricked a drunken boy and robbed him; who was on visiting terms with her, though he had emphatically stated that the connection counted for nothing,—the man who was a friend and comrade of the scoundrel Van Bleit,—the man who was cashiered from the Army for a reason the Colonel had yet to find out. And he intended to find out. He had already started inquiries.

She looked back at him steadily, and her slightly raised eyebrows betokened a faint curiosity. She was fencing with him. They were fighting a duel with wit for their weapons ; and if the first advantage had been on his side, the second and greater advantage was to her. The knowledge annoyed him.

"Mr. Lawless is to be doubly congratulated," he said drily. "Many men would envy him his reputation, all men would envy him the privilege of calling himself your kinsman."

She smiled faintly.

"That is flattery, Colonel Grey," she answered. "But tell me why men should envy him his reputation. I was not aware that it justified envy."

"Is there nothing enviable in a reputation for valour?" he asked.

She turned deathly white, and her eyes glittered angrily in her tense face.

"If I do not misunderstand you," she replied, "that is the meanest speech man ever made."

He looked, as he felt, wholly nonplussed. There was to come a day when he better understood her than incomprehensible indignation, when he not only understood but sympathised with it ; but at the time he was entirely baffled. He could only feel astonishment at her outbreak.

"I fear you do misunderstand me," he said. "There was nothing unworthy in the speech. I merely conceded to a brave man a brave man's due. I have heard many tales of his courage. Men call him Grit who remember him by no other name. If there is truth in hearsay, he has earned the nickname."

His manner was sufficiently earnest to convince her of his sincerity. The swift anger died out of her eyes, leaving them softly pensive, and wistful, like the eyes

of a woman who meets Hope on the road of Disillusion, and being unprepared for the meeting, is inclined to doubt that it is Hope that she encounters.

"Grit!" she repeated softly. And added: "I have not been out here long, and I have heard nothing of Mr. Lawless for years. . . . I have not heard the nickname before, but—I like it. . . . Why do men call him Grit?"

"Because," he answered quietly, "they credit him with being without fear. They tell tales of his courage—or, rather, less of his courage than of his absolute fearlessness. He is a man to whom fear is unknown. . . . That is the popular belief."

"And you do not share it?"

He was not altogether prepared for the question. She sprang it upon him suddenly, as if something in his manner challenged her to the inquiry.

"I have his word for it that he has known terror," he answered quietly, after a brief hesitation.

"That does not disprove his courage," she said quickly.

"No," he allowed. "Courage is fear overcome."

There was another and longer pause. He ended it with the reluctant admission:

"I am inclined to believe myself that Grit Lawless has earned his nickname."

"You give your meed of praise grudgingly," she said. But she smiled while she spoke, and the Colonel was dazzled, as many men had been dazzled before him, by the extraordinary seductiveness of her smile.

It was not until he was back in his bungalow going over the interview, and that part of their talk that had related to Lawless, that it occurred to him her manner had been rather that of a person jealous for a friend's reputation than of a woman who disapproved of, and

disowned, a kinsman. And his old suspicion of her, and of the man whom he had trusted in a difficult and dangerous enterprise, returned with renewed force. It struck him as a highly suspicious circumstance that while Lawless was on visiting terms with the woman he should have given him to understand that the relationship between them was the reverse of friendly. He would have liked to question Lawless on the subject ; but it had been agreed between them for the greater success of their plans that it was safer to hold no intercourse. If either wished to communicate with the other it was left to his discretion to select a trustworthy messenger. The occasion scarcely justified, in the Colonel's opinion, so extreme a measure. If he had enlisted the services of a traitor, it was but another false move of the many that had been made. Trickery could only be mated by trickery. He must keep his own counsel and watch the game. . . .

He remembered, thinking quietly over the evening's entertainment, how Van Bleit had come forward while he was talking with Mrs. Lawless, and ignoring him with pointed insolence, had offered her his arm and led her away on some pretext or another. She had glanced back over her shoulder and given him another of her wonderful dazzling smiles as she left him ; and he had uttered the wish then, which now in the lonely silence of his own quarters he repeated :

“ I would to God that woman were on our side ! ”

IV

LAWLESS meanwhile had renewed his acquaintance with Van Bleit. On leaving Mrs. Lawless' residence he had driven as he had come back to Cape Town, and, dismounting from the taxi outside his hotel, was in the act of paying the driver when Van Bleit passed him with the stream of business men homeward bound while he stood upon the kerb feeling for the change. But that scar on Lawless' face was unmistakable, and Van Bleit, arrested by it, paused in his rapid march and glanced inquiringly at him. Then he came back and waited until Lawless had paid and dismissed his driver.

When the tall, spare man with the ugly scar faced round, it was to find the broad figure of Van Bleit blocking his passage. He held out his hand as carelessly as though they had met the day before.

"God, man!" said Van Bleit sharply. "Where have you sprung from? It's a matter of nearly five years since we met, I believe, if one bothered to calculate; and it seems almost a lifetime. It takes me back into the past to see you. What are you doing here?"

"Damned if I know," Lawless answered laconically.

Van Bleit laughed.

"Grit, you haven't altered," he said.

He scrutinised the thin, handsome face intently. Then he looked from the man to the hotel before which the latter had alighted.

"Stopping here?" he asked.

Lawless nodded, and Van Bleit's manner warmed.

"I've made lots of inquiries about you, but could never learn anything," he said. "I feared you had gone under, but," with a glance at the hotel front, "this scarcely looks like it."

"On the contrary," Lawless answered, "I'm on top at present. I've been under and afloat several times since last we met."

"You struck it rich at the mines, I suppose?"

Lawless laughed unexpectedly.

"Yes," he lied. "I struck it rich at the mines. Any man might who wasn't a fool."

Van Bleit looked cunningly intelligent.

"True," he answered. "If a man wants to get there in Africa it don't do for him to be squeamish. You didn't earn your nickname, Grit, in being over soft."

At the mention of his nickname, Lawless looked fierce.

"Damn you!" he said irritably. "If I remember rightly I owe that to you. It sticks closer than my own. That nickname has landed me in for many a ridiculous adventure. Men seem to imagine that I'm a survival of the mediæval desperado; and I am offered any shady undertaking that entails the slightest risk."

"They pay best, those undertakings," Van Bleit responded drily; and Lawless, regretting the speech as soon as it was made, answered indifferently:

"Very likely. But a man doesn't sweep sewers when he has his pockets lined."

He advanced towards his hotel. Van Bleit walked beside him, and together they passed from the glare of the pavement into the shaded coolness of the vestibule.

"Come and drink to the good old times," he said,—"and to many more good times ahead."

He led the way into the lounge. When they were seated, with drinks on a table in front of them, he asked :

"What are you doing to-night ? If you've nothing more amusing on hand, will you dine with me ?"

"If you care to repeat the invitation on some future occasion, you will see how readily I shall respond," Van Bleit answered. "But this evening I am dining at my cousin's. I don't know if that kind of thing amuses you," he added, after a moment's reflection, "but, if it does, I am confident my cousin would be delighted to welcome a friend of mine. Get into your togs, and I'll pick you up on my way. It's at the Smythes'. Smythe himself is a beastly prig, but my cousin is a good sort ; and she gets hold of the right people, and gives one the right things to eat. What do you say ?"

"Not for me," Lawless answered. "I'm not long returned to civilisation. I'll look on at the game for a while. You go and eat your dinner, and make yourself agreeable—I trust both the meal and the company will come up to expectation—and give me to-morrow evening."

"Good !"

Van Bleit hesitated, looked at Lawless uncertainly, looked about him, changed colour ; then looked at Lawless again.

"The company for me to-night will consist of one," he jerked out in a burst of half-eager, half-reluctant confidence.

His listener smiled unsympathetically.

"The one and only She of the moment ; eh ?"

"Man, you wouldn't say that if you could see her," Van Bleit returned, his manner unusually earnest. "She is the most beautiful woman in the world."

"That's a tall order," Lawless replied drily. "If my memory serve me, you have happened across perfection a few times in your career."

"Never before," Van Bleit asserted. "My God, Lawless——"

He broke off abruptly, and stared at the other curiously, his mouth agape.

"I had forgotten . . . it's the same name," he said. "Are you by any chance related to Mrs. Lawless?—at present living at Rondebosch."

"We are connected by marriage," Lawless answered. He removed the cigar from his mouth and trimmed the ash deliberately. "If you want to stand high in the lady's good graces, you will be well advised not to mention my name. We do speak when accident throws us together, but I believe I state the bare truth when I say that the fact of our paths seldom crossing gives mutual satisfaction."

"Yes! In-laws don't always hit it, of course. I never got on with my brother-in-law. I was glad when the beast died. Still, I regret the breach in this instance; the relationship might have served me. I'm going in to win, Grit. You give me your good wishes, I hope?"

"In consideration of what I have told you, I wonder what my good wishes are worth?" Lawless returned. "But I'll give you a bit of good advice. The lady is puritanical, unpleasantly so. You will never win her favour in the character in which I have known you. Are you going in for reform?"

"I'll go in for anything," Van Bleit answered promptly; "but I'll get my own way." He leant forward and laid a hand on the other's shoulder. "And when I've got it," he said boastfully, "there'll be other changes. . . . We'll close all family dissensions

—my friends will be my wife's. She'll soon see things from my view."

Lawless looked carelessly amused.

"Two people may use the same pair of binoculars," he remarked, "but they almost invariably alter the focus. I never attempted the absurdity of trying to make a woman see through my long-distance lens. Their horizon is generally contracted, and few see beyond that restricted line of their imagination. With your experience, Karl, I should have imagined you had long ago discovered that woman, while appearing the most pliable of substances, is as difficult to bend as wrought iron."

Van Bleit smiled unpleasantly.

"When I can't bend a thing, I break it," he answered.

Lawless regretted when it was too late that he had refused Van Bleit's invitation to dine at his cousin's. He might have got some amusement out of the evening, and the closer he shadowed the Dutchman the better for the success of his undertaking. He decided that in future he would avail himself of such a chance as Van Bleit's offer had promised; by his refusal he had sacrificed a move in the game. That in going to the Smythes' he would perforce meet Mrs. Lawless did not weigh with him: there was as much space between four walls as in the universe if one person did not desire to be brought into contact with another. And he had no intention of inflicting himself upon her. He knew her opinion of him; it was not sufficiently complimentary to cause him to seek her society. Nevertheless he experienced some curiosity to again encounter this woman whose hard purity made her so severe a judge in human affairs,—to measure weapons with her once more. There came to him sometimes in the lonely

watches of the night the belief that one day, despite past failures, he would pit his strength against hers successfully. He never attempted to determine the line his conduct should take in the case of victory; it sufficed for him that the moment should fashion the event. But with the passing years that dream of his triumph steadily receded. He had even given up the expectation of seeing her again. . . . And now he had met her. . . . He had spoken with her. . . . And their sympathies were as widely divergent as ever they had been. . . .

He got up and paced the room restlessly for some time. His thoughts worried him so that inaction became unbearable. He left the hotel, and wandered forth into the city in search of such diversion as it could provide. But his mind still worked round the recent extraordinary events, of which the interview of the afternoon had not been the least surprising; and almost insensibly his footsteps turned in the direction of the Smythes' house. For two hours he patrolled the roadway for the purpose of getting a glimpse of the face he had seen so nearly only that afternoon.

When eventually Mrs. Lawless came forth she was attended by Van Bleit, who saw her into her motor, and closing the door on her, leant upon it confidentially while he made some low-toned remark to her where she sat inside in the dark. Lawless was too far off to hear their voices, but he judged fairly well from the pantomime what was taking place, and he saw by the street light the admiration in Van Bleit's face. His own face, when presently the motor passed him, was as expressionless as a mask. The woman seated inside did not see him. She was sitting very straight and motionless. The smile had faded from the beautiful lips, and her eyes looked sad. Then the motor flashed out of sight, and

the man was left standing stiffly in the shadowy roadway like a sentinel on guard.

The moon shone out suddenly through a rift in the heavy clouds, throwing the tall figure into strong relief, and revealing his face distinctly, stern and set, the scar on his cheek showing livid in the silvery light. As though the unexpected brilliance disturbed him, he altered his rigid attitude abruptly, swung round, and started to walk. He walked rapidly, unconscious of his surroundings in the turmoil of his thoughts. By a process of introspection his mind worked back continually. He regarded himself in a detached, impartial light, as if it were a stranger upon whom he looked, a stranger whose actions he was called upon to criticise and pass judgment upon. Not until that night had he ever considered his actions in a condemnatory light. Life was only a chance. . . . Things had just happened. . . . That had been his philosophy. And he had acted upon it until the thing happened that meant the finish of his career in the Army. He had finished himself socially shortly after that event.

His dismissal from the Service had cut him deeply, and he had bitterly resented it. He had enemies. That was what he had asserted at the time, what he still believed. The other affair he treated as a midsummer-night's madness, and spoke of as such. He refused to consider it more seriously. But the midsummer-night's madness had been responsible for more than the wrecking of his career. And it was of that he was thinking chiefly as he walked along the warm, dusty road between the motionless trees that lined the pathway and cast long black distorted shadows upon the ground. He had not called it a midsummer's madness always; he had thought of it—ay, and spoken of it—once as Love. And he had believed the world well lost at the

time. But that form of madness is transitory. He had come out of the sickness extraordinarily sane,—scarcely penitential, but with a proper appreciation of the truth of certain lines that came to his sobered senses unbidden, yet with an appropriateness that suggested some occult influence, probably conscience, working upon his mind :

“If a man would give all the substance of his house for love,
He would be utterly despised.”

In a sense, he had done that ; and he had won the despite such conduct merited. He had been mad. He said it again to himself, muttering the words under his breath. Then he smiled grimly at the thought behind the words. Poor creature of circumstance ! To be cured of one form of madness only to develop another ! . . .

The ever-revolving wheel of fate turned relentlessly, now bearing him, a mere puppet, upward, now downward in its revolutions. The wheel had been turning steadily downward for a long while now. He wondered whether, when it began to rise again, it would still bear him with it, or whether before that time it would have broken him utterly and left him in the uttermost depths.

V

FOR eight years Lawless had led an adventurous life, consorting chiefly with men who, like himself, were outside the pale of society. He had earned a livelihood how he could, sometimes working for his bread with his hands, at others fairly affluent ; but improvident always, giving away recklessly in his prosperous days what later he knew he would need for himself. It was during one of his poorer periods that he had happened across Simmonds, the man who had since introduced him to Colonel Grey, and so helped him towards a good thing when his fortunes chanced to be at a particularly low ebb. The tide had turned with surprising swiftness.

He found it a little difficult at first to realise this unexpected change of fortune, even more difficult to adapt himself to it. Doubtless it was the influence of Van Bleit that eventually drew him from his misanthropic habits and plunged him, somewhat reluctantly, into the vortex of Cape Town society. The Smythes and Van Bleit introduced him everywhere. Lawless had no record at the Cape. He became known as a man of means, and it was rumoured that his family held a good position in England. The fact that he was connected by marriage with the beautiful Mrs. Lawless added to his popularity ; and the vague information, given by a would-be know-all, that he had once been in the Army and had left under a cloud was discredited by the civilian population. But the men in the Service, especially the man at Government House who was a

relation of Mrs. Lawless, remembered certain things ; the years that had rolled by since Lawless' disgrace were not so many as to have put the affair so entirely out of mind that by a little hard thinking the reason of his dismissal could not be recalled. It was a reason for which few men have any sympathy. But, perhaps because it is not the custom in the Service for one man to give another away, perhaps, too, because this particular man was connected, however remotely, with the most beautiful woman in Cape Town, those who remembered the facts held their peace, and the discreditable whisper died from sheer atrophy.

A certain section of Cape Town society took Lawless up. Among men he was very popular, and the women decided that he was extraordinarily fascinating, if a trifle too reserved. He was a man with very little small talk. Where he recognised a sympathetic personality he left trivialities alone and plunged straightway into the depths. Every emotion he betrayed or called forth was of the most profound. Young girls found him irresistible, but, fortunately for them, he had no taste for anything but a matured intellect. He admired youth externally, but he avoided intercourse with it.

One exception he made in favour of a girl he first saw in a railway carriage while he was returning from Symons Bay to Cape Town in the heat of a late afternoon. The girl was travelling with her mother and sister, and Lawless would scarcely have noticed her but for the persistence of her gaze, which, without her volition, remained unwaveringly fixed upon the scar on his face. His attention was attracted towards her long before she realised that she was observed. He saw her eyes riveted on the scar, and watched her, carelessly at first, but with increasing interest as he marked the effect of his disfigurement upon her. She

stared at the long deep seam with wide, surprised eyes ; then, her imaginative mind conjuring up a battle-field with all the paraphernalia of war, she pictured the moment when that swift relentless slash of the bayonet had been given and received ; and he saw the big eyes darken, and an almost imperceptible shudder shake her slender frame. His own eyes twinkled humorously, and, drawn perhaps by their magnetism, the girlish gaze lifted unexpectedly and met his. If he thought to see her betray a swift confusion, he was disappointed. Apparently it was the most natural thing in the world that this man should be staring into her eyes, and that she should return his stare, not boldly, nor with any thought of intercourse, but with a degree of reverence such as a young girl feels for a brave man.

The rest of the journey was a duel of looks.

When he got out at the terminus, Lawless stood on the platform and waited until the girl and her party alighted. He gave no outward sign of recognition when she passed him, lifting her eyes gravely for a moment to his face ; but the inscrutable grey eyes conveyed far more of meaning than the mere raising of his hat could possibly have done, or even a furtive attempt at speech. The girl went home with her mind full of him. She made a hero of him in her thoughts. Always she pictured him in the forefront of the battle ; she saw him dashing forward against great odds, to be cut down even while he led his men to victory, waving them forward over his fallen body. She invested him with all the attributes which a youthful feminine mind conceives befitting a god of war.

A few weeks later he met her at a ball. He was introduced to her at her request. He had attended the dance more to please Van Bleit than himself, and was standing, a little out of it, near the doorway when

one of the committee came up to him with the announcement that he wished to introduce him to Miss Weeber.

Lawless followed him indifferently. When he discovered that Miss Weeber was the girl of the train, the indifference gave place to a satisfaction that not even the girlish admission that she had solicited the introduction could damp. He was extraordinarily pleased.

"I knew we should meet some time," he said. "It was written. . . . But I never pictured it like this. I have imagined you in an unconventional setting with the veld for a background . . . illimitable space—a selfish picture—with only you—and me. . . ."

"And we meet in the heart of a crowd," she said, and smiled. She liked the imaginative picture that he drew.

"Things are always different in life," he replied, "from what we would have. But I'll not quarrel with the occasion ; we will make the most of it. Will you let me see your card ?"

She handed it to him.

"It is almost empty," she explained. "We have only just arrived."

"That," he replied gravely, "is fortunate for me. I claim every waltz you have left."

"Oh no!" she returned quickly. "I couldn't allow that."

"Then every other one," he said ; and duly initialed the dances and returned her her programme.

The quiet mastery of his manner, the assumption that what pleased him would be equally agreeable to her, robbed her of the power to protest. She was glad and yet discomfited at the number of dances he had claimed ; and she scribbled subsequent partners' names on the card herself, not choosing that others should see those frequently recurring initials. She was also a little apprehensive of what her mother would think if

she noticed, as she could scarcely fail to do, how often she danced with the same man. But she would not have forgone one of those dances whatever the penalty.

Lawless had acted on an impulse in initialing her programme as he had done—a recurrence, even though slight, of the old midsummer madness. She attracted him. She was not exactly pretty, but there was the charm of youth in her favour, and an inexplicable something about her that piqued his curiosity. Also the very obvious fact that she took a romantic interest in him because of an old wound considerably amused him. It was so distinctly feminine. How shall a world in which the mothers of the nations love nothing better than the clash of arms enjoy universal peace?

He recognised that the scar was the fundamental attraction. But for it she would probably never have noticed him; because of it she singled him out from among his fellows, and through it he lived daily in her memory, figuring as greater than the race generally—a modern Achilles with the vulnerable spot in the face. The thing became an obsession. Lawless was conscious even while he danced with her of the fascination the scar held for her; her eyes seldom strayed from it, and between the dances, when he led her to the more secluded places for sitting out, she leant back in her seat and watched it with undiminished interest, while he fanned her and cynically wondered what she would make of the tale if he told her the history of the scar. . . .

Before the evening was very far advanced he did tell her its history—with reservations. She asked for it, a little diffidently, a little apologetically, but, as he felt, with an irresistible curiosity there was no subduing.

"I want to know so badly," she said, colouring brightly. "I've wondered about it ever since I saw you first. . . . You must think it very rude of me.

. . . Of course you've noticed me staring. It's abominable, but I can't help it. It's such a grim souvenir—and splendid too in its way. I've wanted to ask you about it a dozen times this evening, and I've been afraid of annoying you. And yet, why should curiosity annoy when it isn't unkind? . . . I wish you'd tell me. . . . Will you?"

"Better curb your curiosity. You will be disillusioned otherwise," he replied. "It was about the most unromantic moment in my life when I received that."

"Your life must have been very full of adventure," she answered with simple and unconscious flattery.

He smiled grimly.

"It hasn't lacked experience of sorts," he admitted.

She looked up into his face, and her eyes were wonderfully soft, and big with admiration. He was tempted to stoop and kiss the fresh, young, slightly parted lips. He wondered whether she would resent it if he did. But the inclination that moved him to take the liberty was hardly strong enough to cause him to put it into effect.

"Won't you let me judge?" she asked presently.

"Judge what?" he said. He had forgotten for the moment the drift of the conversation; his mind was intent upon her. Then he saw her eyes fasten on the scar again, and, remembering her curiosity, laughed. "Oh, that! . . . I was forgetting. . . . There isn't much to tell, as a matter of fact. It represents one lurid moment, and then a blank. . . . I received that slash over the jaw from one of my own Tommies—we were fighting on opposite sides at the time. . . . The only satisfaction I got out of it was when later I learnt that the man next me had settled the reckoning for me."

"Oh!" the girl whispered, and her soft eyes hardened. Behind the hardness there lurked conflicting emotions

of pity and horror. Naked fact seemed so much grimmer, so much more significant of the hatred and the actuality of war than her heroic imagining. She had drawn for herself a splendid elaborated picture of dash and courage and the glory of battle, and in a few words he had blotted her picture from the canvas and set up in its place the rugged and brutal reality. But the reality, though it hurt, was far more impressive than her carefully stage-managed adaptation.

"He deserved death," she said. "How dastardly to attempt to kill his own officer! . . . A deserter, too!"

"No, not a deserter," he contradicted quietly.

"But you said he was fighting on the opposite side!" She looked up at him suddenly. "Was it during the Boer war?"

"Yes."

He played with her fan, which he was holding, opening and closing it absently, bringing the sticks together with a little click. Then abruptly he shut it with a snap and laid it back in her lap.

"There are necessarily two sides to every question, and generally much to be said on both," he remarked in his sharp, incisive manner. "The man who was fighting on the Boers' side had been dismissed the Service, and I suppose, having the killing lust in him, he gave his services where they were appreciated."

"That's treachery," she said.

He smiled at her cynically.

"I'd like your definition of treachery. . . . I imagine you hold the popular exaggerated ideal of man's duty to the State. Fine thinking is all very well in theory, but put it to the test, and where are you? . . . This world is built for the practical, not for the sentimentalist. A thousand years hence we may be sufficiently civilised to make the ideal life possible. Then we shall be

satisfied to recognise one another's good qualities, instead of overlooking them in the eagerness of our eternal search after the bad. But that will entail social and political revolution—and the abolition of war."

"You say that!" she cried, catching on to the part of his speech which she understood.—"You!—a soldier!"

"My only right to the title now is that of soldier of fortune," he replied.

She looked a little surprised.

"Of course I knew you had left the Army," she said.

"But once a soldier always a soldier."

"On the principle that the leopard cannot change his spots!"

"I've only heard that applied to vicious tendencies," she said.

"Very true," he returned with a harshness of tone and manner that she was puzzled to account for. "There is never any hope for the damned in this world. . . . When a man has been evil we see to it that we keep him so."

Had it been possible for him to displease her, he knew that he would have done so then. As it was, his sentiments disappointed her. She could not understand, and therefore had no sympathy with, a cynical outlook on life. And he was lacking in self-appreciation. She was a type of womanhood who enjoys a heroic pose,—a type that is unconsciously responsible for the braggart and the egotist. He was perfectly aware that he might have made a fine story out of the scar that appealed to her so powerfully, that he could have posed as a very god in her eyes; but he was either lacking in conceit, or the desire to stand high in her regard was not sufficiently strong to incline him to be boastful. And the scar was one of the distinctions he was least proud of. It marked the most gallingly unsuccessful period

in a life which, it seemed to him, had been one big futile promise. Few men had had better chances, fewer still had been hedged about as he had been by conflicting and destructive forces. His very temperament was opposed to a successful career. And yet he had all the gifts—and he knew it—that go towards the making of a successful man. He was bigger than the majority, a man who even as a failure was bound to make his mark. But a mental superiority only made him realise more certainly his inadequacy in other respects. He chafed at the knowledge of wasted powers, the perversion of ideas, and the lowering of talents to fit the altered conditions of his life. Some men adapt themselves to evil fortune, but to the man who realises his essential place in the scheme of things, to be forced to take a position on a lower plane is humiliating to the point of revolt. Time had accustomed Lawless to his downfall; but his resignation was no reconciled submission, it was at best acceptance of the irremediable.

The girl had risen at the conclusion of his trenchant speech, and stood, holding her fan loosely in both hands, looking up at him in the dim rosy glow of the Chinese lanterns. She wore white with a string of pearls round the slender throat. Lawless, looking down at her, observed how thin her shoulders were. The prettiest part of her neck was hidden—the concession to youthful modesty.

"The band is playing the next dance," she said.

"Yes," he answered. But he did not move at once. "You are dancing it, I suppose?"

She nodded. At the moment she wished that she had been less eager to fill her card. He was sitting out most of the dances. She had watched him hanging about doorways looking on with a slightly bored curiosity, and once or twice she had passed him on her

partner's arm seated alone on the stoep. His aloofness appealed to her imagination. Everything in connection with him interested her tremendously. She was even tempted to skip the next dance, and trust to her partner not finding her in this secluded and dimly lit place. It was not so much the knowledge that such conduct was unworthy, as the fear that he might think less highly of her, that kept her to her engagement.

"I'm sorry," he said. "I shall look forward to our next waltz."

She smiled up at him suddenly, and stooping deliberately he held her by both arms and kissed her on the lips.

It had been an impulse, not an irresistible impulse ; he had made no effort at resistance. The red young lips appealed to him,—the girlish homage appealed to him. She was altogether fresh and delightful. And she did not resent his conduct. For a moment she drew back startled, a little confused, a little undecided as to what she ought to do ; the next instant self-consciousness vanished ; she was pathetically proud and pleased and grateful that this hero of her imagination should feel sufficiently kindly towards her to wish to kiss her. She remained quite quiet under his hands, blushing, with eyes downcast, and a little fleeting smile playing tenderly about her mouth. He removed his hands from her shoulders, and offered her his arm.

"Your partner will be getting perfectly rabid," he said. "I suppose I must take you back now to the madding crowd, kind little friend. . . ."

Afterwards he wondered at himself. The thing was absurd. . . . A girl in her first season ! It puzzled him to think what the attraction could be. She was not even especially good-looking. A starving man is no epicure, he told himself ; and determined—but did not keep his resolve—to leave the thing alone.

VI

THE band was playing a barn dance when Lawless and his companion re-entered the ball-room, and most of the dancers had already taken the floor. A disconsolate-looking youth, who was wandering aimlessly round the room with his gaze continually on the exits, hurried towards them when they appeared in the doorway, and eagerly claimed his partner.

"I thought you had forgotten," he said to her reproachfully, "that this was our dance."

"Oh no!" she answered as she took his arm. "Only I didn't hear the music quite at once."

She let him lead her straightway among the throng of dancers, and was surprised to find how little the excitement of the exercise moved her, to whom dancing had once seemed an all-sufficient joy. Her partner's rather commonplace, but heretofore entirely satisfying, conversation pleased her no more than the movement. That dance was altogether the dullest and most stupid affair in which she had taken part. Other dull dances were to follow. Throughout the evening she rather unfairly compared each of her partners with the man who was already enshrined in her heart and worshipped as a hero.

Lawless, having handed Miss Weeber over, retired to the stoep to smoke. Van Bleit was there, and several other men who possessed assertive thirsts and a settled belief in a reservation of strength. There was a small bar fixed up at one end of the stoep. Lawless made his

way to it, and Van Bleit joined him, but refused to drink. He chaffed Lawless good-naturedly on his partiality.

"It's most marked, old chap," he said. "Why don't you ring the changes? I overheard quite the best-looking girl in the room declare she was dying to dance with you, and I as good as promised to introduce you. She's keeping the supper dance open."

"Then you'd better book it yourself, Karl," the other answered indifferently.

"I'm not booking anything," Van Bleit replied with a quiet smile. "I'm reserving myself until SHE arrives."

Lawless emptied his glass hastily and set it down.

"You don't mean," he said, moving away from the buffet, "that Mrs. Lawless is coming to-night?"

"Why wouldn't I mean that?" Van Bleit asked, looking at him curiously.

"It's close on midnight, man. And . . . this kind of show! . . ."

"She isn't such a puritan as you imagine," Van Bleit rejoined.—"I ought to know something about that by now. . . . And she promised me she would come to-night. There was something—some rotten music she was going to hear first with the Smythes. Then they were coming on here."

He pitched away his cigar and twirled the ends of his big moustache into fine points curving upward, which gave him, he imagined, a distinguished and military appearance. He was well enough to look upon without going to this excess of trouble.

"She's not keen on dancing," he added complacently; "but I've had her out on the floor once or twice. Her waltzing! . . . it isn't dancing . . . it's a poem. And the satisfaction of her nearness! . . . Just to hold

her in one's arms! . . . Oh Lord! Lawless, if you only knew what it felt like! But you're too damned self-contained to understand. You simply sneer till I want to hit the look off your face. I wonder whether any woman ever warmed your fish-blood, and set your pulses beating a fraction of a second quicker!"

"You seem to forget my violent partiality of this evening," Lawless returned sarcastically.

"Pshaw! It's no bread-and-butter miss who'll set your veins on fire." And then, the man having a kink in his nature which made him peculiarly evil, he added: "It's quite a safe game, though. There are no interfering male relations. The mother is the widow of a wool-merchant. They're not well off; and she'd welcome a wealthy son-in-law. Incidentally, there is no reason why a man shouldn't amuse himself."

"I will make the mother's acquaintance to-night," Lawless answered, and struck a match and lighted himself a cigarette. Van Bleit was sucking cachous for the sweetening of his breath. The smell of musk irritated Lawless' nostrils. "It takes some living up to," he observed drily.

"What does?"

"Being enamoured of a goddess."

"Oh!" Van Bleit laughed sheepishly.

"In these days, when most women smoke themselves, I should consider such precaution unnecessary."

"Women appreciate it," Van Bleit responded. "It's a tribute of masculine homage."

"One of those tributes," Lawless answered, "that cost so little either in the way of self-sacrifice or money that men don't mind offering them. But love asks bigger things. That's where the majority of us jib. Love is over exacting; we quarrel with it on account

of its demands. . . . I suppose where a man's love was big enough to understand, it would be equal to removing mountains and draining the ocean. . . . In lesser cases it contents itself with sucking sweets."

"You are trying to make out that you know something about it, I suppose?" Van Bleit said, slightly nettled.

Lawless laughed.

"I should never attempt the moving of mountains," he replied.

Mrs. Lawless arrived during the extras that followed immediately upon the supper dance. The ball-room was empty, save for a few couples, mostly young enthusiasts who preferred to make the most of their opportunity when the floor was not so crowded, and to sup later when the refreshment-room too had thinned, and the faithful Van Bleit. He insisted upon taking her in to supper. She had come with the Smythes; and she turned to Mrs. Smythe at the mention of supper and lifted protesting shoulders.

"One cannot keep on eating," she said.

"Karl can," Mrs. Smythe responded.

"I'm famished," he said. "I've been waiting until you arrived. In fairness to me you must come and see me through."

Smythe pointed to the revolving couples.

"We shan't get seats," he said; "they're crowded out, you see."

"Oh! I'll find room. There isn't such a crush as all that."

"Well, you can take the ladies. There's a limit to human endurance . . . a drink will satisfy me."

"We shall have to go," Mrs. Smythe said, slipping a gloved hand within Mrs. Lawless' arm. "When I have determined people to deal with I never argue. It is so much less trouble to give in."

Van Bleit conducted his party to the supper-room, and found seats for three at a table near the door.

"What a pity Theo didn't come," Mrs. Smythe remarked, with a glance at the vacant chair on her right.

She looked round the crowded room and nodded to several acquaintances. There was a confusion of sound that yet was not noisy,—the hum of talk and laughter, the frequent popping of champagne corks, a soft continuous rustle of movement, and the clatter of knives and forks. She glanced smilingly across Van Bleit, who was trying to catch the attention of a waiter, to where Mrs. Lawless sat, leaning forward looking away from her towards the next table.

"Zoë, the sight of all these people feeding makes me hungry," she said.

"Of course you're hungry," Van Bleit responded. "You can't sit up all night on nothing."

But Mrs. Lawless apparently did not hear. She was gazing with unconscious intensity at a man at the table on the opposite side of the opening. He had his face towards her; but he had seen her entry, and, having watched her while he could do so unobserved, he now gave his undivided attention to the girl beside him.

Mrs. Lawless regarded the girl with critical interest. There was nothing especially remarkable about her in any way. She was young and fresh-looking, and wore a simple white frock, and a pearl necklace the beads of which were of a size to open up doubts as to their genuineness in an inquiring mind. Mrs. Lawless did not question the pearls; she accepted them, as she accepted the peerless youth of the wearer, as parts of a whole the effect of which was pleasing.

She turned in response to a question of Van Bleit's as to what she would eat, and answered carelessly:

"Oh! anything."

He ordered for the three of them, and then sat back in his seat and surveyed the scene at his leisure. He saw Lawless at the table opposite with the girl he had danced with most of the evening ; but he made no reference to him. He acknowledged the acquaintance before Mrs. Lawless, but, remembering what Lawless had told him concerning her disapproval of himself, he never admitted intimacy for fear of prejudicing his cause. Mrs. Smythe, on the other hand, made no concealment of her liking for her friend's discredited kinsman. She did not often speak of him to Mrs. Lawless, recognising that the subject was rather more painful than the ordinary family dispute, but nothing would have given her greater pleasure than to assist towards a reconciliation between them. With that end in view she had given Lawless an open invitation to her house, thinking that perhaps if occasionally brought together by chance they might eventually, if only for the sake of appearance, smooth over their differences and close the breach. Continued feud was the invariable result of an exaggerated sense of dignity on both sides, and it was old-fashioned. But Lawless very seldom availed himself of her kindness, and had managed his few visits so far when Mrs. Lawless had not been present. She more than suspected design in this, and it helped to strengthen her belief that the estrangement had originated with him, and that he was responsible for its continuation.

"You don't like that chicken," Van Bleit remarked abruptly to Mrs. Lawless, observing that she was only trifling with the food upon her plate. "Let me send it away and get you something else."

"Please, don't," she remonstrated. "I've already dined. I'm just keeping you in countenance."

"But that's rotten for you," he expostulated. "If

I had really thought it would bore you, I wouldn't have brought you here. Drink some more champagne then, if you won't eat."

"I'm not in the least bored," she replied, flashing a brilliant smile at him. "To eat is not my sole source of amusement. There is plenty to interest me here for an hour, if you are inclined to stay that time."

"I'm not," he returned. "I'm longing to try the floor. I've not danced yet. . . . I've been waiting. You'll give me the first waltz after supper?"

She met his bold, eager gaze pensively, her splendid dreamy eyes expressing a slight hesitation.

"You know I don't care for dancing," she said.

"Yes, I know. But . . . just one waltz!" He leaned nearer to her. "You won't disappoint me? . . . I have waited through the entire evening for this."

She smiled at the extravagance, but faintly, and looked away across the crowded room with its numberless small tables, and the gay, careless, laughing company that filled them.

"Oh! if you make so much of it! . . ." she said.

Mrs. Smythe, who was also gazing about her with more interest in the company than in the supper, here interposed with the irrelevant remark:

"I think Colonel Grey is the most distinguished-looking man I know."

Van Bleit grunted.

"Oh! I know you don't like him, Karl. . . . It's obvious that the antipathy is mutual. But that doesn't make him any the less interesting from a woman's point of view. What do you think, Zoë?"

"I think he is exactly what you describe him."

Mrs. Smythe looked at her in surprise. It was not the words, but the manner in which they were delivered, that arrested her attention.

"You don't like him either," she said.

Mrs. Lawless smiled.

"*He* doesn't like *me*," she corrected. "And though I find that attitude interesting, it does not encourage affection on my side."

"Impossible!" Van Bleit exclaimed incredulously. "Dear lady, you must be mistaken. I haven't much of an opinion of him, but he can't be such an unappreciative hog."

The man referred to had risen, and, with his supper companion, now prepared to leave the room. They were not the first to make a move; the tables had thinned considerably since the entry of Van Bleit's party. He paused for a second by Mrs. Smythe's chair and spoke to her, and bowed to Mrs. Lawless. He did not see Van Bleit. Neither did he see Lawless. When he passed his table his head was turned towards his companion and he was deep in conversation with her.

Van Bleit watched him curiously, and the finely pointed ends of his moustache lifted slightly as the lips beneath it smiled.

"He rather overdoes it," he murmured.

"Overdoes what?" his cousin questioned.

Van Bleit looked at her. He had not, as a matter of fact, intended the remark to be heard.

"His diplomacy."

"You are pleased to be cryptic," Mrs. Smythe returned.

He suddenly laughed.

"I must have made my meaning very obscure when you're not on it," he said. "I was merely criticising the fellow's habit of ignoring the people it doesn't suit him to see. But come. . . . Shall we go? You are neither of you eating, and I don't care to feed alone."

Lawless rose when they did, and, with his partner

on his arm, followed them to the ball-room. The band was playing an extra, a waltz. He passed his arm around his companion's waist and joined the throng of dancers, whose numbers momentarily increased as the supper-room emptied itself of diners.

Van Bleit was waltzing with Mrs. Lawless. He had persuaded her to try the floor when it was not so crowded ; but before the dance was far advanced the room had filled surprisingly, and dancing became difficult. A slight block occurred in one corner, and Van Bleit found himself held up temporarily with his partner, so closely wedged that he had much ado to keep the crowd from pressing on her.

"I'm sorry," he said. "When we get out of this we'll find a seat somewhere outside."

Mrs. Lawless did not answer him. She was conscious of an arm pressing against her shoulder, pressing hard, and, looking up, met fully the keen grey piercing eyes of the man whom before that night she had not seen since the afternoon when he had called upon her at her house in Rondebosch. The arm, the shoulder of which pressed her shoulder, belonged to him. It encircled the girl who had sat beside him during supper, the girl in the white frock with the string of pearls about her neck. She leant against him, laughing, flushed, and happy, her eager eyes alight with excitement. It was all enjoyment to her ; the crush with that strong arm to shield her was part of the fun.

Mrs. Lawless scarcely noticed the girl ; she looked above her, and for a long moment gazed back into the sombre dominating eyes, the owner of which surveyed her as he might have surveyed a stranger, with an intense yet aloof curiosity. In the quiet, steady, concentrated look he bent upon her, and in his grave, unsmiling face, there was an amount of interest, even

of admiration, but no outward sign of recognition. The initiative, Mrs. Lawless realised, was with her. She smiled faintly, a smile that was half-diffident, half-wistful; and then suddenly the crowd swayed, parted, and moved forward again; and Van Bleit steered his partner between the revolving couples to the nearest exit.

"What a beastly squeeze," he said, when they emerged into the fresh air. "I'm afraid you will blame me for letting you in for that."

Mrs. Lawless sat down on a settee on the stoep. She was flushed and a little breathless; but it was not owing to the crush in the ball-room; she had been so well guarded that she had scarcely felt the inconvenience of the crowd. She looked at Van Bleit, and there was a gleam that was almost triumphant in her eyes.

"I'm not blaming you. . . . As an experience, I enjoyed it," she said, and laughed.

She put up a hand to her shoulder. She could still feel the impression of a man's sleeve against her flesh. It had pressed hard. The man had stood like a rock, immovable and as firm; there had been no give in the shoulder that had, as it were, set itself against hers. In all probability, she decided, there was a red mark upon her arm. If Van Bleit had not been present she would have made an examination.

"I wish you would go and find me a wrap," she asked him suddenly. "I brought one with me. It isn't altogether wise to sit here without after getting so hot dancing."

And when he had gone she moved deliberately into the brighter light that streamed forth through the open doorway of the ball-room, and pulling her sleeve aside examined the arm. The mark she had expected to discover was there, a faint pink stain upon the whiteness

of the soft flesh. She lowered the sleeve over it gently, and her face quivered. And yet it was only a small matter that could not have caused her the least pain.

"I trust you were not hurt a while since?" a voice addressed her curtly from the doorway, and lifting her eyes for the second time that night, they encountered the keen gaze of the man who was responsible for the injury. She flushed quickly.

"No," she answered, and hesitated, confused and obviously nervous.

He stepped out on to the stoep.

"Where's your partner?" he asked abruptly.

She explained, and he turned and walked beside her away from the bright light and the sight and sound of the dancers. His own partner had been compelled to retire to the dressing-room to have some damage to her frock repaired. She would not be back to finish the dance, which was practically finished then; the music was getting faster and faster, and so were the hurrying feet.

"Do you care to sit down?" he asked, pausing before a couple of low chairs arranged in a sheltered corner of the less-frequented side of the stoep. She seated herself in one, and he took up a position behind the second, leaning forward with his arms on the back of it.

"Shall I stay . . . until Van Bleit returns?" he asked.

"Please do."

She clutched at the arm of her chair, grasping it firmly. There were so many things she wanted to say to this man, and time was so short; at any moment they might be interrupted. . . . The precious moments were slipping away. . . . And he gave her so little help. His manner was so curt as to be almost repellent.

"Do you think it necessary," she asked, "that when we meet it should be as strangers—almost enemies?"

"Aren't we that?" he said. "I understood that I represented both to you."

She was silent because his last words had recalled a hard thing she had once in the years gone by written to him in an hour of wounded anger: "I do not know you. . . . I think I have never known you. You are a stranger to me, and, I see now, my greatest enemy. . . ."

"It is for you," he added, filling in the pause, "to determine our future relations. . . . I am a little surprised that you should meet me as you have done. And I'm not sure that it wouldn't have been happier for both if you had acted differently. . . . The fires of yesterday are ashes on the hearth of to-day. . . . I don't know how it is with you, but the sight of greying embers chills me."

She sat leaning forward, her eyes fixed unseeingly straight before her as though they sought to pierce the blackness that lay beyond the stoep. Some of the pain and bitterness that was in her heart shone through them, so that they looked tortured in the soft glow of the artificial lights. She gripped the arm of her chair more tightly, and, still staring into the darkness, said tonelessly:

"With women it is not usual to leave ashes lying on the hearth."

"You sweep them up and throw them away," he answered. "It is wiser so. . . . One forgets."

"Some do," she rejoined slowly. "And others—collect their ashes carefully and kindle them anew."

He looked at her closely.

"Foolish and futile," he said. "Ashes can never give forth the glow and the heat of unspoilt fuel. A thing that is dead has served its end. It should then

be applied to other uses ; for it is impossible that it should ever again serve its original purpose."

"If that is your philosophy," she began——

"It is," he interrupted shortly.

"Then with you the ashes remain ashes to despoil the hearth of to-day ! "

"I brush them out of sight," he returned lightly. "I have lived so long now amid the dust of such memories that I have learnt to turn my back upon the muddle till it no longer inconveniences me. . . ." He smiled cynically, and added : "There was room for a retort there. You might have flung out at me that I have always shown a propensity for turning my back."

She winced. His speech cut her more than he would have believed any words of his could wound her. It was with great difficulty that she kept back the tears.

"That wasn't worthy of you," she said.

He reddened suddenly.

"I beg your pardon. . . . It was an ill-considered remark. But it's one of the memories that sticks closest. . . . The dust of it lies thick upon everything and clouds the rest of life."

She sat back in the depths of her chair and turned her white face up to his ; a great sadness and a great yearning showed in the beautiful eyes.

"I think you make too much of it," she said. . . .
"The accident of a moment ! . . ."

"An accident that ruined my career," he returned with great bitterness.

"Not ruined it," she expostulated,— "checked it. You could have made a name and a place for yourself in spite of it."

"And I didn't."

"And you have not," she corrected,— "yet."

He laughed abruptly.

"Think of the time that has been wasted," he said. "You might have said all this to me years ago. I don't say it would have made any difference . . . unless it were to keep green some corner of my heart. But encouragement to be efficacious should be given when life is hardest, not when one has learnt to adapt it to one's needs. But it's generous of you to offer even a belated encouragement. I don't wish to appear ungrateful. It's more than I have deserved—or, indeed, expected of you."

She stretched out a hand and laid it on his arm.

"Don't be bitter, Hugh. . . . We both have made mistakes."

He looked down at the white glove that rested on his sleeve, and his lips tightened. The arm inside the sleeve was tense. There was no more response than if she had touched instead the stuffed arm of the chair.

"Perhaps," he allowed. "But we won't add to our mistakes by growing sentimental."

She removed her hand without speaking, and sat silent with strained face, curiously still and composed. He watched her in his aloof fashion. If he felt any interest in her beyond the ordinary interest that a man experiences in a beautiful woman, he concealed it admirably. He betrayed not the slightest regret when Van Bleit came hurrying up to them with a light wrap over his arm. He had had some difficulty in finding it. Mrs. Smythe eventually assisted in the search. He was voluble and apologetic. He shot a suspicious glance at Lawless, standing at the back of the chair in the same position, leaning forward with his arms on the top of it, and then turned again to the quiet figure of the woman who had not spoken after the first smiling word of thanks.

"You moved," he said. "I looked for you where I left you, but the seat was unoccupied."

"It was quieter here," she explained.

She rose and stood while Van Bleit put the wrap around her shoulders, and, with an exaggerated air of devotion, drew it close about her throat. Lawless bowed to her and moved away, making a slow progress along the stoep against the stream of dancers, pouring forth from the ball-room in quest of air.

"Gods!" he mused, avoiding the stream mechanically while seeming not to see it. "What a queer trick of fate! What has brought her out here, I wonder? . . . That's what I should like to get at. . . . What has brought her out here?"

When in the early hours of the morning Mrs. Lawless appeared on the pavement on Van Bleit's arm, Lawless was standing on the kerb beside the waiting motor in the act of lighting a cigar. He tossed away the match, and opened the door for her. Then he raised his hat, and turning silently, disappeared into the blackness beyond the lights of the car. She turned her head to look after him; but the darkness had swallowed the tall figure, and the throbbing of the engine drowned the sound of his rapidly retreating steps.

VII

COLONEL GREY sat alone on his stoep in the darkness and listened, as once before he had listened, to the quick, measured step of the man whose claim upon his consideration had rested solely on a reputation for valour.

The Colonel had believed strongly hitherto in his own discernment. Now he doubted, not only his judgment in human affairs, but his qualification for the responsible mission he had undertaken to carry successfully through. Twice he had been mistaken in the persons he had employed. He had paid off the one a month before, and had satisfied himself that the boy had taken his passage to Durban, and gone aboard with his broken head still encased in bandages, and with more money in his pockets than was good for him. The other case could not be disposed of in the same manner. In so far as their dealings together went, the man had given no cause either for satisfaction or complaint. Up to the present nothing definite had been accomplished. Colonel Grey doubted that anything would be accomplished. He mistrusted his man—the man whose reputation for courage he now knew to be spurious,—who was further accredited with being a traitor. The thing stuck in the Colonel's mind and inflamed it. In a quiet, controlled way he was furious that he should have been led into having anything to do with the scoundrel. He was impatient to face him, to confound him with the knowledge of his disgrace. He wondered

whether the fellow would try to bluff it, or if he would cave in. . . .

And then the man he was thinking about arrived, and stepping up to the stoep with his firm, decided tread, stood before him, as he had stood on the night of their first meeting, looking at him inquiringly with those strangely penetrating, inscrutable grey eyes.

"You sent for me," he said briefly, and waited to learn the reason of the summons.

The other man rose without speaking, and led the way into the house, closing the French windows behind them as he had done before.

"You are sure you were not followed?" he asked, as he drew a chair out from the table and seated himself.

"I think not. I saw no one."

"Ah! . . . I fancied I heard footsteps in the road."

"You have good ears," Lawless answered. "I heard nothing, and I was on the alert."

Colonel Grey regarded him attentively. It was an extraordinary thing, but the sight of the purposeful face, with the steady eyes, and the deep, slanting scar, was strangely reassuring. Unaccountably, he felt his resentment dying. Against his reason, against his volition, he had a liking for the man. In face of his liking the charges against him seemed monstrous. It was almost incredible that he should have been cashiered from the Army for cowardice—"misbehaviour in the Field in the face of the enemy," that was the wording of the indictment. He had received the information from an unquestionable source. Through the same channel he had learnt that subsequently, under another name, he had taken up arms against his country. The first was a grave enough offence in the Colonel's opinion, the second was unpardonable.

"Have you no news for me?" he asked abruptly,

sitting very straight in his chair, his brows drawn fiercely together while he watched his companion from under them with a curiously intent gaze. "It is many weeks since we met."

Lawless leant back negligently, his knees crossed, one arm, with the hand lying loosely open, resting on the table. At his last remark he looked over at the speaker in his quick, direct way, and said :

"I supposed that was why you had summoned me. You've been wondering what I have been doing with your time and your money. . . . Well, not much. . . . I've learnt one thing, that Van Bleit carries the papers on his person for their greater safety, and a loaded revolver for his own. Apart from that we are not more forward."

"You've no plan for getting the packet from him ?"

"Not so far. The fellow does not give me a chance. If I spent forty-eight hours beneath the same roof with him, I'd manage it. . . . Of course, I could get hold of what you want at any time if I chose to kill the brute ; but I've a strong disinclination to swing for him."

"Yes." Colonel Grey looked thoughtful. "That wouldn't do," he said. "No ! . . . We don't want murder done. . . . Risky. . . . And awkward too . . . afterwards . . . too many questions asked."

There was silence between them for a space. Inside the room a death-watch ticked loudly against the wainscot, and without a large white moth beat with futile insistence upon the window-pane in its endeavours to reach the light. The noise of its soft body thudding against the glass drew Colonel Grey's attention to the fact that the blinds were not drawn. He rose promptly and lowered them.

"Quite unnecessary," Lawless observed. "I saw

to it when I took this seat that no one, unless he stood on the stoep and stared deliberately in at the window, could see me sitting here."

The Colonel wheeled round and faced him.

"Your forethought is quite extraordinary," he said, "for a novice at the game."

The other laughed carelessly.

"During an adventurous life," he replied, "I've had rogues to deal with before."

The speech, as the Colonel heard it, was almost a challenge. His mind reverted to the serious indictment against this man who sat there so coolly, with the half-derisive smile lingering on the thin, handsome face; and the fierce feeling of indignation against him surged up afresh. He walked deliberately back to his seat and sat down.

"Yours has certainly been no ordinary career," he said bluntly. "For the honour of my countrymen, I'm glad to think that is so. . . . You will be less surprised at my taking this tone when I tell you that I have received information concerning you of a very unsatisfactory nature. Subsequent to our first meeting I instituted inquiries relative to certain matters we touched upon at that interview. The reply to those inquiries reached me by last mail."

"Yes." Lawless did not change his lounging attitude, but his face hardened perceptibly, and his voice rang like steel. "After our talk I supposed you would," he said. "The only thing that surprised me was that you didn't pursue your inquiries before making arrangements with me."

"That was where I made my mistake," the Colonel replied stiffly.

"And how do you purpose rectifying that? . . . Do you think that the charges against me, as you have

heard them, unfit me for the dirty work you have given me to do? I've had some strange billets in my time, and this, in my opinion, is the least honourable of all. A case of blackmail that can't be entrusted to the proper authorities is a precious shady business."

"There are reasons," the Colonel began, and stopped suddenly. Why should he attempt explanations? Whatever the business, the employment was worthy the man.

"Well, no matter!" Lawless said. "Let that pass. But I should like to hear what you have against me. . . . When it is one's misfortune to only win notoriety through misdeeds it is interesting to know the limit of such publicity. . . . What part of my record have you?"

"I have no interest in your affairs, Mr. Lawless, beyond your one time connection with the Army," Colonel Grey answered quietly. "When you informed me you had been cashiered, I was curious to know the reason. I am now in possession of the details, and the further discreditable information that you sold your sword arm to the enemies of your country. . . . Have you anything to say to that charge?"

"Nothing. . . . Your information is quite correct."

"Then, sir, I will tell you to your face you are a damned traitor."

The Colonel was leaning forward in his excitement, his arm stretched out along the table. The man he addressed, and thus deliberately insulted, drew himself up straighter, his face set and stern, a cold glint in the steel-grey eyes that narrowed dangerously as they met the other's angry gaze.

"I can excuse your heat, sir," he replied with amazing control, "in consideration of your ignorance of the circumstances. Had things been otherwise, and it

had been my privilege to criticise another's disgrace, I should probably have made use of the same forcible language that you give utterance to. . . . When we have been through the mire we recognise a different quality in the mud. Men have been reduced to the ranks for the misdemeanour for which I was dismissed the Service. . . . Had I been reduced to the ranks I should have made a good soldier. My punishment, I contend, was unjust."

"By which specious reasoning, I presume, you excuse the crime of treachery, and seek to justify a spirit of revenge?—or gain, was it?"

Lawless frowned.

"I make no excuses," he returned curtly. "I don't recognise that my actions need condoning. And I did not join the Boers' side with thought either of revenge or gain. . . ."

He halted abruptly, and, for the first time taking his eyes off the other's face, stared hard at the unshaded lamp.

"It appears," the Colonel interposed drily, "that you were actuated by blind impulse."

Lawless drummed on the table with his fingers and said nothing. He felt strangely annoyed. And yet he had known positively that the facts must come to this man's knowledge before long. In the circumstances it was little likely that he would make no inquiries concerning one he had employed in a secret and confidential matter. That he regretted his haste in having employed him was obvious. It was the term traitor that stuck in the Colonel's gorge. He found it particularly distasteful to hold further intercourse with one so steeped in dishonour.

"Perhaps it would be as well to bury the past," he said with an effort after a while. "In the lives of many

men there are matters which it is not profitable to discuss. I can only add that I wish I had known of this before."

Lawless got upon his feet, and stood stiffly upright, his face grim, and colourless under the sunburn, like the face of a man whose blood is at white heat with hardly repressed passion.

"Am I to understand that you dispense with my services?" he asked curtly.

Colonel Grey was somewhat slow in replying. Discretion weighed in the balance against a strong personal objection to working with the man, and won.

"I don't know as to that," he replied at last uncertainly. "We've gone so far. . . . You have a dangerous knowledge. . . . I prefer to have you on our side."

"I see." Lawless' manner was icy. "Then, you mean me to go on with the job?"

"Yes, I think so. . . . Yes! . . . I do."

"You don't ask me whether I am satisfied to go on with it."

His hearer's eyebrows went up with a jerk.

"Why shouldn't you?" he asked, surprised. "You're well paid."

"True! The pay's good. It would be absurd to throw away good money for a scruple. . . ."

"I was under the impression that you had buried your scruples," the other answered, and was amazed at the sudden passion that blazed in the sombre eyes.

"Never in my life before have I permitted a man to insult me as you have insulted me," was the angry reply. "I've swallowed as much as I intend to swallow. . . . Whatever you have learnt concerning my past does not invest you with the right of insulting me."

"Your complaint is quite reasonable," Colonel Grey returned with a certain quiet dignity that partially disarmed the other's wrath. "I have allowed my feelings to lead me away. I regret it. Will you please be seated, Mr. Lawless? There are one or two things which I wish to say to you, if you are satisfied to go on with this business."

He paused deliberately; and, after a moment's hesitation, Lawless sat down.

"In the first place," he added, when Lawless was again occupying the chair from which he had risen, "I think we should have a time limit for the carrying out of this enterprise. Is that agreeable to you?"

"Perfectly," came the brief response.

"Then, suppose we say six months. . . . How does that strike you?"

"It's fair enough."

"You haven't any suggestion of your own to make on that head?"

"None. . . . Only I shall get the papers before six months are up."

"You are very confident," the Colonel said.

Lawless looked thoughtful.

"I take a peculiar personal interest in this affair," he said. "If I did not I should not go on with it. . . . I told you I would get those papers for you, or kill your man. . . . I mean to do one or the other—or both."

Colonel Grey scrutinised him earnestly. His lips parted as though he would say something, and then shut with a snap on the unspoken words. Lawless sat up suddenly.

"There isn't any use in your seeing me," he said. "Give me my head, the funds to go on with for a few months, and then leave the matter in my hands. You shall have those papers. . . . It's not that I take a

particular interest in them, or in your client, but it pleases me to do this thing. When I make up my mind to carry a thing through I do it. You may call that tall talking—but it amounts simply to this, that I hold life cheaply ; the only law I recognise is the unwritten law. I've lived among the social outcasts—I'm one of them, and so, perhaps, I am well suited to carry through a matter that is outside the law. You don't trust me. . . . Because of what you have heard you doubt even that I have the courage which this affair may demand. It's natural that you should doubt. But if you can bring yourself to accept my word, this matter is safe in my hands."

There was a long silence. Then the Colonel spoke abruptly, and, as it sounded, greatly against his inclination. But in spite of himself, in spite of all the evidence against him, he liked and trusted this man. Perhaps the fact that he had not attempted to explain, or to excuse an inexcusable crime, prejudiced him favourably.

"I do accept your word," he said bluntly. "I confess I have entertained misgivings. . . . That is hardly surprising, I think, considering how much is at stake. But I'll take your word, Mr. Lawless. . . . And I accept your conditions. When you have anything of importance to communicate you will let me hear from you. . . ."

When Lawless got back to his hotel that night he was astonished to find a visitor waiting for him—a woman. She had been shown into a private room. The hour was unusual, so were the circumstances ; but the management had no wish to offend so good a client as Lawless ; therefore the lady was, after a little difficulty, admitted ; and Lawless on his return was discreetly informed of her presence. He received the information in silence, betraying none of the astonishment that

moved him, which was considerable. He could not for the life of him imagine who the lady could be.

He was no wiser on entering the room where she was. She was a tall woman of commanding presence, very fashionably dressed—almost too fashionably to suggest a perfect taste. There was—Lawless was quick to observe it—the unmistakable stamp of the demi-mondaine about her. She looked round as he entered and closed the door behind him, and then very slowly got up from the sofa on which she had been seated. Her movements were extraordinarily languid for a woman of such splendid physique, and less graceful than deliberately sensuous, Lawless decided. Something about the woman stirred a chord of memory in his mind, as he stood critically surveying her with a look of cool inquiry in his eyes. The figure was vaguely familiar. The face he could not see; she was so heavily veiled that he could only trace a shadowy outline of her features.

“This is an unexpected honour,” he said, with ironical politeness. “May I ask to what I am indebted, and to whom, for this amazing condescension?”

She held out a pair of well-gloved hands towards him.

“You have forgotten . . . so soon?” she said in a low voice, the deep tones of which sounded nervously tremulous.

“I’ve a memory no longer and no shorter than most men’s,” he retorted, not touching the outstretched hands. “If you’d raise your veil. . . .”

She put up one hand to the dense folds that concealed her face, but she did not lift them. She waited, looking at him through their disfiguring thickness with wide, smiling, observant eyes.

“And this is your welcome after all this while! . . . your welcome to *me*! . . . No wonder those tiresome

people downstairs were so reluctant to admit me ! . . . I only got round them by telling them I was your wife."

"The devil you did !" ejaculated Lawless.

He did not speak loudly His voice had dropped to a low note of caution. He approached nearer. Astonishment had driven the irony out of his eyes, and left in its stead an expression of strong curiosity.

"Oh, Hughie !" she said reproachfully. . . . "To think that you could forget ! . . ."

Lawless seized her by the arm. Then quickly, almost roughly, he lifted the disguising veil and stared hard into the handsome, painted face, with the smiling vermilion lips, and the mocking eyes.

"Oh, Lord !" he exclaimed, and fell back a step or two in sheer amazement.

The woman laughed suddenly.

"I thought I should surprise you, Hughie," she said.

VIII

IT is a generally accepted fact that the social life of the Colonies is less conventional than the social life of England. It is broader in outlook, wider in sympathy, not less critical, perhaps, but certainly more understanding. This is to be accounted for by the continual inpouring of fresh blood, the infusion of fresh ideas. The Colonies adapt themselves more readily to change than the older civilisation ; they represent a younger, more vigorous generation, and, if behind the mother country in many respects, are ahead of her in others of quite vital importance. But though life in South Africa is unconventional, strenuous, and—as is inevitable in a land that attracts to its shores the more ardent and adventurous spirits—more impulsive, more passionate and unrestrained, it has its fixed code of morality, and the man or woman who defies its laws must be prepared to accept the reward of ostracism.

Lawless' sudden leap to popularity suffered an equally sudden rebound when it became apparent how utterly contemptuous he was of public opinion, as it concerned his private life. His life became an open scandal. The woman who had visited him at his hotel late one night was installed in rooms that he had taken for her, and regularly every day he visited her, and frequently took her driving in the public thoroughfares. The women of his acquaintance cut him, and not a few of the men. His behaviour was too flagrant to be passed over. Van Bleit alone was interested and sympathetic. He

coveted an introduction to his friend's handsome inamorata, and on occasions when he deemed it quite safe put himself deliberately in the way. But Lawless was blind to these devices. He cared neither for the disapproval of the many, nor for Van Bleit's furtive approbation. He was entirely indifferent to outside criticism. It pleased him to do this thing, and he did it. Society had not treated him so well as to give it a right to be exacting; and, in any case, he had no intention of considering it in this or any other matter.

There were two women in Cape Town who were most unhappily affected by this sordid intrigue, Mrs. Lawless, and the girl who had made a hero of the man, and who worshipped him with the extravagance of a youthful, unsophisticated mind. For a long while Julie Weeber refused to admit that there was anything unusual in Lawless' friendship with the handsome demi-mondaine; but in her heart she was jealous of the friendship, and when she saw them together she hated the woman with the complacently smiling, painted lips, and the mocking eyes. Her distress was primarily due to the knowledge that by his actions he was separating himself from her. She would have condoned anything for the gratification of seeing and talking with him occasionally. But intercourse was out of the question; not only did her mother assert that she would neither receive him in future nor permit her daughters to acknowledge him, but Lawless himself held aloof. Once when she passed him in the street driving with the woman, although she knew he had seen her, he deliberately turned his face aside. It wounded the girl deeply.

"Why should he treat me like that?" she asked herself passionately. . . . "It isn't fair to me."

She encountered him again a few days later. He

was alone, walking towards the city. Julie had been to see a friend some distance out, and was cycling homeward when she overtook him. It was evening. The sun had dipped below the horizon; where it had disappeared the sky still glowed with changing colours that paled perceptibly before the oncome of precipitate night which in Africa follows rapidly on the path of the vanished day. A shaft of the fading colour in the sky glanced earthwards and glowed in Julie Weeber's cheeks when she recognised the solitary pedestrian striding along the middle of the road. She slackened speed as she drew near to him, and glanced swiftly about her. No one was in sight, not even a Kaffir; though had a crowd been there to witness her actions she would probably have behaved in exactly the same way. She pedalled her machine alongside the tall, familiar figure, and slipped to the ground. Lawless glanced round. He looked surprised, he also looked—Julie observed it—pleased.

"How do you do?" she said, deliberately holding out her hand. "Isn't it a beautiful evening?"

He smiled involuntarily at this determined effort at conversation, and answered that such was his opinion also.

"Are you walking into town?" she asked. "I am, too."

"You mean, you are riding," he corrected.

"I'm not," the girl returned imperturbably. "I hate cycling against the wind. I only stuck to my machine because it's lonely walking by oneself."

"In that case," he said, stepping behind her and relieving her of the charge of the cycle, "you must let me wheel this."

Julie walked along beside him for a few yards without speaking. Then abruptly she turned her face towards

him. He was looking down at the machine, a very old one with well-worn tyres and rusty handle-bars of a pattern quite out of date. His face was grave and somewhat preoccupied.

"You cut me the other day in Adderly Street," she said bluntly. . . . "You saw me. . . ."

"Yes," he admitted.

It did not seem to occur to him to turn the speech aside. During their brief, but rapid, acquaintance they had always been extraordinarily frank with one another.

"Why did you?" she asked almost fiercely. "It wasn't kind."

"In that I differ from you," he replied. "It was the only kind act I have ever performed towards you."

A pained flush leapt to her cheeks. She looked away from him down the dusty road, along a vista of flowering gum trees, with eyes that were clouded and misty and rebellious, and a mind that for all its youthfulness dimly discerned his meaning.

"I thought we were—friends," she said falteringly.

And then he made use of one of the remarks that were responsible for the development of her understanding.

"There is no such thing as friendship between the sexes."

The flush in her cheeks deepened. There was a strained air of embarrassment about her, noticeable even in her walk.

"And so . . . you don't wish to know me?" she said with an effort.

"My dear child!" He looked at her earnestly. "It's not a matter in which I am entitled to consider my wishes."

"And what of mine?" she asked in a low voice that

was tremulous, as though the speaker were on the verge of tears.

He looked down awkwardly, and fidgeted with the handle of the brake.

"I don't consider that I am entitled to consult your wishes either," he replied. "My friendship, according to the accepted standard, is neither good nor safe for you. . . . Haven't you been so informed?"

"Yes," she answered, and added sullenly: "I don't care. . . . I want your friendship more than I want anything. It has meant so much to me. . . . And I miss . . . things so. You never come to the house now. . . . You never go anywhere."

"No," he returned briefly.

There was silence between them for a while. Then suddenly Julie put out a hand and touched his hand where it hung at his side.

"You won't—cut me again?" she pleaded.

"No," he answered as briefly as before, but in a kinder tone with a ring of determination in it that carried conviction.

"I want to see you sometimes," she said. . . . "to talk with you sometimes. I know that I'm not intellectual, that I'm undeveloped and silly, and altogether too young to be companionable to you; but you have taken pleasure in my society—you have," she exclaimed with vehemence, "haven't you?"

"Yes," he acknowledged, "I have. . . . I do. And it's just because of that I deem it best to let the thing end."

"Oh no!" she cried quickly. . . . "No!"

"When you talk like that," he said, smiling at her pleasantly, "you convince me that my judgment is right. . . . Oh! don't worry," he added in response to a quick gesture of protest; "I'm not going to rely on

anything so stodgy. I'm going to follow inclination. Remain my dear little friend. . . . If there is no great good to you in it, there shall be no great harm in it either. . . . And, in any case, it won't matter much. . . . I am going away shortly."

"Going away!" she echoed blankly. "Leaving Cape Town, do you mean?"

"Yes."

She turned to him with a swift abandonment that proved how strong was the influence he already exerted over her, and with white face, and distressful, tear-filled eyes, cried out—

"Oh! don't go! don't go! . . . Or—couldn't you—take me with you?"

He came to an abrupt standstill, and leaning towards her, with his hand resting on the saddle of the cycle, looked steadily into the shamed, young, piteous face. His look brought the colour flaming back into the white cheeks.

"Ah! now you think me unwomanly," she said, and her voice shook pitifully. . . . "You won't like me any more. . . ."

"My dear!" he replied, "you are talking nonsense."

Her head drooped lower and lower like a flower that is beaten down in a storm. She stared down at the strong, sunburnt hand gripping the saddle, and the slow tears overflowed and fell, big, shining drops, into the dust of the road. She made no effort to stay them or to wipe them away; and the man, watching her with his keen, observant eyes, was stirred with an unwonted sense of compassion, and a swift self-hatred because of what he had in idle selfishness done.

"If you knew me for what I am," he said gravely, "you would not honour me with your friendship. I'm not the hero your fancy has painted. A man

rates himself at a higher valuation usually than his deserts, but as high as I can place the standard it leaves me still unworthy of your regard."

"And you don't feel . . . contempt for me?" she faltered.

"No. . . . The only contempt I feel is for myself." He held out his hand to her "We are coming to the more frequented part," he said. "I would prefer that you mounted and rode into town."

She gave him her hand shyly, but still she hesitated.

"You promise not to withdraw your friendship?" she pleaded. "I—I don't know what I should do if—if you wouldn't let me be—just a friend."

Her eyes as well as her voice implored him; they dragged a reluctant consent from his lips. When she had mounted and cycled out of his sight, turning at the bend of the road to wave him a last farewell, he regretted that he had allowed his better judgment to be overruled by her girlish pleading. Public opinion was right in this instance; there was danger in the friendship. There had been danger for the girl from the beginning; since intercourse in the future could only be by stealth that danger was considerably increased. The secret friendship of a young girl for a man of notorious character must be disastrous in its results even if the man act towards her honourably according to his lights.

When Lawless reached his hotel he found two letters waiting for him in the rack. He carried them to his room. The first, so ill-written as to be scarcely legible, was signed "Tottie." The writer stated that she was bored to death, and commanded him to come round and amuse her. The second was also in the nature of a command. It was very short—only one line.

"Will you come to see me?—Zoë."

He read the second note twice, and then remained for a long while motionless with the letter in his hand, staring at the big, firm characters thoughtfully, his brows puckered in a heavy frown. Why had she written to him? . . . Why should she wish to see him, when all self-respecting women held their skirts aside? . . . The frown deepened. He was baffled by the very simplicity of the brief message, the meaning of which was so purely conjectural and obscure. He read the note for the third time, seeking enlightenment from a greater familiarity with the words. But the purpose of the message still eluded him. He could not imagine what was in the writer's mind to move her to pen such a note. It was inconsistent with her attitude in the past. He felt strangely irritated, even suspicious, as he stared at the sheet of paper in his hand. It was a little late in the day for her to think of starting an "influence." . . .

He seated himself at a writing-table in a corner of the room and answered the note. His reply was laconic in its brevity. "No," he wrote, and signed it simply, "H. L." Then he addressed it and slipped it into the pocket of his coat with the idea of posting it himself. She would probably expect him that evening, he decided, and smiled ironically, thinking of the writer of the other letter, who was also expecting him, and whom he had no intention to disappoint. In the morning she would receive the answer to her note; then she would understand.

But the answer was not posted. Lawless was delayed as he was leaving the hotel; when later he set forth his mood had changed, and he tore the reply he had written into fragments and scattered them on the pavement, to be further scattered by the boisterous wind that swept them into corners, only to dislodge them and

scatter them anew. A few of the fragments fluttered under his feet as he strode along. He trod them heavily underfoot and walked on. Would she conclude from his silence that he would obey the summons? . . . He was not quite sure whether by his action in destroying his answer he meant to accede to her wish, or simply to ignore it. A strong curiosity as to her reason for wishing to see him strove against his disinclination to comply with the request. Finally he decided to leave the matter in abeyance. If the humour took him he would go to her the following day. But the humour did not take him. The next day came and passed, and the note remained in his pocket still unanswered.

Mrs. Lawless waited at home each day in the hope of his coming, and denied herself to other visitors. On the third day she made an exception in favour of Mrs. Smythe.

"I came to inquire if you were ill," Mrs. Smythe exclaimed as she entered the drawing-room. "You were not at the Frenches' the other evening, and we missed you yesterday at the Admiral's At Home. You aren't ill, Zoë. . . . I don't think I ever saw you look better."

She surveyed her friend critically. There was no indication of ill-health in the dark splendour of Zoë Lawless' face, nor in the graceful, beautiful body, but in the sun-flecked eyes was a hint of sadness which Mrs. Smythe detected.

"You are tired," she said.

"No." Mrs. Lawless drew her to the sofa and sat down beside her. . . . "At least not physically tired," she added. . . . "I'm feeling old. I'm thirty-three to-day, Kate." She lifted the dark hair at her temples. "Grey hairs there already, plenty of them. I spent some time this morning pulling them out, until it occurred

to me as rather trivial . . . and futile, too. It's like stripping the red leaves from the trees in autumn in a poor pretence that the summer is not past. . . . It only advances winter."

"My dear girl!" Mrs. Smythe said briskly, "when you are sixty-three you will be privileged to talk like that. . . . Don't say too much about your age; I'm thirty-five."

Zoë laughed, and as suddenly grew grave again.

"With you age doesn't signify," she said. "You've had your years, and lived them, and each one has brought its past year's satisfaction; but with me there has been waste." She leant back against the cushions, with one arm flung out over the head of the sofa. "The years that the locusts have eaten!" . . . she murmured. . . . "It's when you have let the locusts eat into the precious years that you feel the bitterness of the loss of the golden hours. If I'd had my golden hours—if I'd enjoyed them, I shouldn't feel sorrowful at the coming of silver hairs. Youth that is wasted is like a day when the sunshine has been obscured by clouds. Towards evening the clouds pass, and the sun shines forth, perhaps, for a few minutes before it sets. But the clouds have spoilt the morning and rendered the tardy radiance ineffectual. . . . The time has passed."

"Your philosophy would be less painful if it were not so incontrovertible," Mrs. Smythe returned quietly. "But if there has been waste, Zoë, isn't it adding to it to spend the hours mourning over those already gone? It would be far more sensible if you were to get out of that ridiculously becoming teagown and come out driving with me. I'm not surprised at your depression if you have spent the last few days dwelling on uncomfortable things."

Mrs. Lawless smiled faintly.

"It's not so bad as that," she answered. "I'm a creature of moods. Had you called yesterday you would have found me quite cheerful."

"Then I'm glad that my visit has fitted in with the heavier mood. Cheerfulness needs no distraction. Change your gown, Zoë, and come out with me."

Mrs. Lawless shook her head in response to her friend's inquiring look. Her fingers were playing absently with one of the heavy tassels of a sofa cushion, twisting and pulling at it, and entwining themselves with the silky strands. She looked down at the tassel pensively, and at the busy fingers fidgeting with it continually as though their purposeless occupation held an interest for her.

"Thank you for suggesting it," she said slowly. "I would have been glad to go; but I am expecting Mr. Lawless."

Mrs. Smythe stared at her. Amazement bereft her of her customary tact.

"Expecting him! . . . this afternoon? . . . Why, my dear, I passed him driving with——"

She came to an abrupt halt, and gazed at her quiet companion with dismayed and apologetic eyes.

"His mistress," Zoë finished for her, looking up. "You needn't mind saying it. . . . I have accustomed myself to the idea. He may not come this afternoon, of course. . . . But—I think I prefer to stay at home."

Mrs. Smythe was silent for a while.

"I never was so disappointed in anyone in my life as I am in him," she remarked at length.

Zoë's big eyes showed a faint surprise.

"No!" she said.

"Aren't you disappointed in him?" Mrs. Smythe asked wonderingly.

"Oh! I don't know. . . ." She sat up suddenly. "I try not to think of it," she said. . . . "It's another instance of waste . . . waste and failure. All the years I've known him——"

She looked at the other woman, and her eyes softened.

"Perhaps if he had felt the influence of a good woman he might have made a better thing of life."

IX

MRS. LAWLESS stood on the stoep in the fading light and watched her friend drive away. In the east the intense blue of the sky had deepened to purple, and here and there a pale star lay, like a jewel in its azure setting, ready to adorn the sombre robes of night. The light breeze had dropped at sundown. There was no stir, no movement anywhere, no sound to awake the stillness. The strong scent of many flowers perfumed the languid, sensuous air which as yet gave no sign of the near approach of winter . . . if there can be any winter in a land where there is always sunshine, where the trees never bare their branches, and the flowers are ever in bloom.

She leaned her arms on the broad rail, and stared unseeingly before her through the foliage of the mimosa trees into the blue distance. The expression of her face was troubled, and a gleam of resentment shone in the proud eyes. So her summons was to be disregarded! His mistress claimed all his leisure, and he had no time to spare for anyone else. She had waited in three days in the hope that he would come, had spent three lonely evenings so that if he chose to call on her at night he would find her ready to receive him. And he had neither come nor sent a message. She had almost ceased to expect him, had almost ceased to wish to see him. The mood that had moved her to write to him had passed. She felt cold now, and indifferent; and the futility of the task she had thought

to undertake struck her in a new and more forcible light. Was it worth it? . . . Was she not wasting time that might be more profitably employed? . . . Was she not harrowing her feelings to no purpose? . . .

She went indoors and sat down at the piano and played to herself. She was a brilliant pianist, and it was a custom of long standing to soothe herself with music when her mind was disturbed. It was in her sad moments—occasionally also in her moods of anger—that she oftenest played.

The light outside faded; it grew dark in the room. A native entered, lighted the shaded lamps, and noiselessly retired. Zoë Lawless played on. She did not hear the ring at the bell that followed shortly on the servant's exit; she was not aware that anyone had come until the door was thrown open by the same quiet servitor, who ushered in Mr. Lawless, and then again retired and closed the door behind him.

Mrs. Lawless turned slowly on the stool, and then stood up. She gave the visitor no greeting, and, beyond a slight bow, he made no move to greet her either. But he looked at her curiously as she stood facing him, and she observed with failing courage that his eyes were stern and hard.

"I had almost given up expecting you," she said.

"You sent for me," he answered curtly. . . .

"Whenever you send for me I will come."

She regarded him long and earnestly. There was that in his speech which, despite the harshness of his manner, inclined her towards a softer mood. She no longer saw the picture which Mrs. Smythe had unconsciously drawn for her of him driving with his mistress, instead she recognised a man whom life had dealt hardly with accepting obligations which another man in similar circumstances would have ignored.

"Thank you," she said at last gently, and with a faintly wondering hesitation. "I did not know. . . . I—felt scarcely justified in writing my request. . . . But"—she put self-consciousness behind her, and spoke from her heart simply, and with great earnestness—"I could not look on in silence while you deliberately spoilt your life. You were making your way in Cape Town. . . . You could, if you chose, make it anywhere. But you are so indifferent to the world's opinion."

"I have never found the world's opinion especially intelligent," he answered bluntly. "If it were worth studying, I might study it."

"Is it not, rather," she returned unexpectedly, "that you are over prone to yield to the influence of the hour? . . . The opinion of others has never counted for much with you."

"You are mistaken," he said. "It is the opinion of others that has made me what I am. In the past I have been far too susceptible of public criticism. Had I been as indifferent as you imagine I should not be the failure that you see to-day."

She threw out a protesting hand.

"You always speak as though there was nothing ahead, as though you had shuttered all the exits of the soul. . . . When you talk like that I feel that I cannot breathe."

"It's only a first impression," he answered sarcastically; "respiration becomes easier when you grow accustomed to the shutters. . . . There is nothing ahead. I reconciled myself to the want of outlook years ago; now I adapt,—not myself to circumstances, but circumstances to suit me. It's astonishing how one can bend events to one's service. The doing so contrives to add a peculiar satisfaction of its own. I don't wish you to suppose that I've been sitting all

these years with my head between my hands—the image is depressing. My hands have been otherwise employed. I've had them on the throat of life, and when it has used me spitefully I've pressed it hard in return. I've had some bad knocks, I admit; but, believe me, I'm not beaten yet. And the bruises have healed. The marks may be apparent, but there is no soreness. . . . And those blows served a purpose too. They confirmed me in a resolve I made more than eight years ago,—to live my life independently of my fellows,—to enjoy such pleasures as the moment offered,—to deny myself no single desire that I had the means of gratifying. I have not gone back on that through all these years."

"Not a very lofty resolve," she said, as she sank into a chair.

"No. . . . Not from your point of view. . . . I suppose not."

"And from your point of view?" she asked.

He laughed.

"You forget the shutters," he said. "My view is enclosed. I am unable to gaze up at the heights."

"You could open the shutters if you would," she said in a voice that was only a little louder than a whisper.

"Perhaps I don't wish to," he answered.

He moved nearer to her. He did not sit down, but he leant with his arms on the back of a chair, looking at her, as he had leant the night of the ball when they had talked together on the stoep.

"I'm satisfied with things as they are," he said. "I've got used to the rough and tumble of my lot. And I've become so thoroughly saturated with the belief that it is no concern of anyone's what I do that it's very unlikely I will submit to interference. I'm behaving quite abominably, I know," he added, in response

to the quick, pained flush that warmed the pallor of her skin from the smooth brow to the slender white column of her throat; "but it would be a satisfaction to me if you would only realise that I'm not worth your distress. I understand what your idea is—most good women fall into the same error. But when a man has no desire to be influenced it is waste of time to attempt it."

Her glance fell under his direct, steady look, and the embarrassed colour that had flamed into her cheeks retreated and left them whiter than before. She put up a hand for a second as if to screen her eyes from the light, and he knew that she was pressing back the starting tears.

"I know," she said very low, and without looking at him, "that I've no right to interfere. But whatever you say,—whatever you think, we can none of us act independently of our fellows. When we do wrong we are bound to hurt someone—as well as ourselves."

There was a brief silence during which both still figures remained so rigidly quiet that the subdued ticking of the dresden clock on the mantelpiece sounded intrusively loud in the stillness. Then Lawless moved abruptly.

"You mean," he said, "that I am hurting you."

"Yes. . . . You are hurting me."

He straightened himself and walked away to the window, where he stood looking out at the quiet night. A young moon shone like a white curved flame in the purple dome, casting its pure reflection on the misty beauty of the garden that, like a picture painted without colour, lay motionless under the starry heavens,—patches of black shadow, and splashes of white where the pale flowers showed in clusters in the uncertain light.

"I never thought of it touching you," he said after a pause. "I suppose . . . the scandal——"

"Oh! the scandal!" She looked up with a quick resentment in her eyes. "Can't you get deeper than just the part that shows?"

"In this instance," he returned quite quietly, "it's the part that shows which matters—only the part that shows. If I were doing this thing secretly I should be reckoned decent living, and be well considered of my fellows. And it would never have offended your susceptibilities, nor disgusted other women whose feelings I have not a jot of respect for. You simply wouldn't have known. . . . It appears to me that it is the part that shows which means everything."

She answered nothing. She sat still, watching him, with her fine eyes clouded and disapproving, and her lips closed in a thin, determined line of scarlet that looked the more brilliant because of the set whiteness of her face. He swung round suddenly and faced her.

"I might have anticipated this," he said. "But, oddly enough, I never took you into consideration. After all, you've a right to complain. . . . The same name! . . . Yes, it's awkward—very . . . and unpleasant."

He crossed the room and stood in front of her chair, looking down at her with an almost hostile expression in his sombre eyes.

"In your opinion," he asked, a hard resentment in his voice, "is there any reason why I should especially consider you?"

She looked back at him steadily.

"Have I not already acknowledged that my interference is unjustifiable?"

"True!" he allowed, and thought for a moment.

"One condition alone would give you any right to take exception at anything I do," he added—"and that is such an unlikely condition that we need not reckon it in. . . . But, however dead I may be to all sense of honour and decency, I have still sufficient perception to realise that the situation is—uncomfortable for you. It shall cease to annoy you. I leave Cape Town this week."

The expression of glad hopefulness that had momentarily lighted her eyes died out as suddenly as it had kindled. She understood him perfectly. Because this thing was humiliating to her he was going to remove it from her path. That much he would concede—and that was all.

"You are going away?" she said in a low voice, leaning towards him.—"And you will take your mistress with you?"

"And I take my mistress with me," he answered firmly. . . . "Yes."

She winced. He was standing so close to her chair that she could not rise without touching him. She sat farther back, and leant her dark head against the cushions as a woman who is weary might do. This was but another of the many bitter moments she had endured on his account. An icy coldness crept over her and seemed to grip her heart. She had battled with her pride so fiercely and persistently, setting up an ideal of duty to be followed despite every difficulty, with this man's salvation as its ultimate aim; and at the very outset she owned herself defeated. She could not plead with him; a certain intolerant hardness in her nature awoke and set a seal on her lips. If he was so lost to all fine thinking, to all sense of decent living and restraint, let him go with this woman who was a fitting companion for the ill-spent hours. She would

not undertake so futile a mission as to attempt to dissuade him.

"If that is final," she remarked at last, "there is nothing more to be said."

"It is final," he answered.

He moved away. She did not rise, but she turned her head and looked after him, the proud eyes darkened with trouble that was not caused only by distress at what he purposed doing, but by her lack of power to hold him back.

At the door he paused, and glanced quickly in her direction.

"This interview has been unsatisfactory," he said abruptly. "I have disappointed you. I regret it, because on a former occasion when I solicited an interview you were more considerate. If you didn't send for me solely with a view to improving my morals, but were content to accept me as I am, the result might be more satisfactory for both of us. Good-night."

He went out and shut the door sharply behind him, and Mrs. Lawless, sitting still where he had left her, listened to the bang of the hall door, and to the crunching of his steps upon the gravelled path as he walked past the drawing-room windows to the gate. She heard the gate open and swing to after him, and then followed silence—silence so profound, so prolonged, that to the woman seated alone in the quiet room it was an immense relief when presently the sound of a concertina floated in through the open windows from the direction of the servants' quarters. The sound broke the tension. She moved slightly, and her eyes lost their fixed expression. She plucked at a soft fold of the silken teagown with nervous fingers, and listened absently to the strains that drifted towards her on the evening air. A Kaffir

was singing in a rich, deep voice to his own untaught accompaniment.

" All de world am sad an' dreary everywhere I roam."

The haunting, familiar air with its tender pathos, its hopelessness, its strange beauty, moved her to an extraordinary degree, perhaps because she was so deeply moved already. A sob caught her throat, and the unaccustomed tears started to her eyes for the second time that evening. As before, she put up a hand to press them back, but they pushed their way under her lids and between the restraining fingers, and coursed rapidly down her cheeks. . . .

" Oh ! darkies, how my heart grows weary ! . . ."

The sob was louder this time. . . .

" Oh ! darkies, how my heart grows weary ! . . ."

Swiftly she turned and buried her face in the cushion of the chair and wept unrestrainedly.

X

LAWLESS made hasty preparations for leaving Cape Town. He did not give up his room at the hotel. When a man is spending other people's money there is no particular need for him to study economy. His headquarters were at Cape Town—he was merely taking a holiday while he matured his plans. On the day before he left he lunched with Van Bleit at the latter's invitation. Van Bleit was openly admiring, and not a little envious.

"Going on your honeymoon," he murmured, growing maudlin over his wine. "You lucky devil! But the luck was always with you, Grit."

"It depends on what one reckons luck," was the dry response.

"That's just like you favoured chaps—always grudging in your thanks. You expect the world to come to heel, and it usually does."

"Yes; and yaps at your trouser hems until it frays them. I've been out at elbow and empty in pocket. . . . If that's luck I don't appreciate it. I've no desire to have the world at my heels, with its sneaking hands dipping into my pockets, and its servile lips smiling while its teeth worry holes in my clothes. I like to face the enemy and have my foot on it."

"You, to talk of the world as your enemy! Why, man alive, it gives you all you ask for."

Lawless looked gloomy enough for a wealthy and successful lover. The other's envying admiration gave

him no pleasure. He took up his glass and drained it. Both men had been drinking freely, but both were well seasoned, and, save for their flushed faces, there was no outward sign of the quantity of wine they had imbibed.

"I wish to God," Van Bleit said, "that I were as successful in my wooing as you. Give me your secret, Grit. . . . I believe it's that damned scar on your jaw that helps you with the women—that, and a certain dash you have."

"Oh! call it swagger," growled Lawless.

"No,—damn you!—I would if I could; but it's not that. All things considered, you're a fairly modest beast."

"I've not had so much to make me vain as you imagine," Lawless answered, and added curtly: "Look here, Karl, if you don't wish to be offensive, give over personalities. I'm sick of myself."

Van Bleit looked slightly annoyed.

"You're so devilishly unsympathetic," he complained sulkily. "I notice you take no interest in another man's affairs. . . . You never trouble to inquire how my suit prospers."

Lawless made no immediate response. He took a cigar from a case of Van Bleit's that lay open on the table, snipped the end deliberately, and proceeded to light it. When he had had two or three whiffs at it, he took it from his mouth, leant forward with his elbows on the table and looked squarely at his host.

"I don't need to inquire," he said. "I've been observing. . . . You are making no headway at all."

"That's true enough," Van Bleit replied, reddening. "Though, dash it all! you needn't be quite so brutally frank. I'm not making headway. Sometimes I fancy I have gone back a few paces. At one time she liked

me—I'll swear she did. She used to appear glad to see me. That was before you turned up."

He paused, and eyed Lawless for a moment suspiciously. The alteration in Mrs. Lawless' manner and the advent of Lawless on the scene being contemporaneous roused a sudden doubt in his mind.

"You've not been giving me away?" he asked. . . . "You haven't told her of any of our little sprees? If I thought you'd made mischief! . . . I've noticed you talking with her, though you as good as told me she'd sooner talk with the devil."

Lawless puffed away at his cigar indifferently.

"My good fellow," he said, "she has not the faintest idea that you are a friend of mine. And we do not discuss sprees, or anything of that nature. The only topic she ever gets on with me is that of my morals, which ever since I have known her have caused her distress and annoyance. It is a topic which you may easily imagine holds no interest for me."

Van Bleit looked only half convinced.

"I'd let a woman like that talk to me about anything," he returned. "I'd let her try her hand at reforming me—I *would* reform for her sake."

"You might—for a month or so . . . yes."

"Oh, go to blazes!" ejaculated Van Bleit irritably. "You don't believe in anything."

"I don't believe in a nimbus for you, Karl, old man," Lawless replied with unruffled serenity. "All the same, I'm glad to see you in earnest for once. When a man is in downright earnest he generally wins."

He smoked for a few moments in silence.

"Have you put your luck to the test yet?" he asked, trimming the ash of his cigar with careful deliberation.

"No."

Van Bleit drummed on the table, and stared moodily at the cloth.

"She never gives me a chance," he said. "She's cleverer than any woman I ever knew at putting one off. She makes a man realise that if he persists in coming to his point he'll get the wrong answer, and, of course, when a fellow's in earnest he isn't going to risk that."

"Naturally."

There was silence for a few seconds. Then Lawless spoke again.

"You might win if you'd try the right tactics," he said. "But I know that it's no use advising a man in love. . . . You simply wouldn't take the advice."

"Well, let's hear it, anyway," Van Bleit said churlishly, still drumming on the tablecloth with his big, coarse fingers. "If I think it's worth anything, I'll follow it, I daresay."

"Keep away from her for a time."

Van Bleit looked up at him sharply.

"You say that!" he cried. . . . "You!—just off on a honeymoon of your own! What would you reply if a man advised you to chuck it?"

"If you were off on your honeymoon," Lawless returned calmly, "my advice would be unnecessary."

"But why," Van Bleit persisted, "should I keep out of her way? What purpose could it possibly serve? . . . It would give others a chance, that's all."

"She would probably miss you," Lawless answered. "When she realised that, she would want you; and when you returned you would be sure of your welcome. . . . You needn't scowl. You asked for the advice. I didn't suppose you would take it, and I shan't feel offended if you don't."

"I don't believe in the efficacy of that plan," Van Bleit said shortly.

"A man in love wouldn't," Lawless returned indifferently. "The moth has to make for the light."

"Well, but——"

Van Bleit appeared to be wavering. He stared hard at the inscrutable face opposite, trying to gauge the purpose of the carelessly given advice that accorded so ill with his own inclinations. But he could make nothing of it. The man baffled him as he baffled many another. Although he had given the advice, it seemed to be a matter of supreme indifference to him whether it were acted upon or not.

"I've a great belief in your knowledge of women," he said slowly.

Lawless smiled.

"It's faith in my disinterestedness you lack," he threw in, and Van Bleit did not deny it.

"You've never been keen on it, somehow," he observed. "I noticed that when I first told you about it. . . . Seems as though you couldn't get out of the manger. I suppose it is human nature that a man should object to seeing another fellow's success in the case of a beautiful woman, even though he knows himself out of the running."

Lawless leant back in his seat and puffed a number of blue rings into the air.

"You may know a lot about human nature, Karl," he said presently, "you're very human yourself—but you don't know me. If I've been somewhat unsympathetic over this affair it's because I happen to know something of both of you. I realised that you were serious, but I never imagined you stood anything of a chance. . . . It wasn't until I saw you together that it occurred to me that, if your chance was not great,

she certainly liked you. She is not prodigal of her favour, so I think you have grounds to feel flattered. But women, when they grow accustomed to having a man at their beck and call, are inclined to take it rather as a matter of course. Relegate him to a distance, and they appreciate a service they have not realised until they are called upon to do without it. That's my experience. . . . But go your own way, old man, and if you find your tactics fail then follow mine."

Lawless left Cape Town that night. He did not go alone, a fact that transpired very quickly, and caused consternation in more breasts than one. Colonel Grey was beside himself with fury. The man was an adventurer of the worst kind. He was living riotously on the money that was allowed him for a definite purpose, and that purpose, which was hazardous and dangerous and highly important, was being neglected while he amused himself after his own loose fashion with the funds that should only have been applied to one end.

The Colonel summoned Simmonds to a consultation, and told him in the plainest language what he thought of the man he had recommended.

"I did not recommend him," Simmonds returned. "I told you I knew very little about him. His noted pluck was the only qualification I gave you."

The Colonel stared at him.

"True!" he muttered. "His courage! . . . Yes! I accepted that without proof. And when I saw the man I accepted him. This is where it leaves me."

He looked at the other for a while without speaking, thinking deeply. This man—the traitor, the coward, the licentious liver—was in his pay for a term of six months. He had agreed to that, knowing what he did of the man's past life. He had believed in him. The strong, virile personality had been strangely convincing,

all the more so in view of the fact that he had made no attempt to vindicate himself, nor sought to explain away facts. There had been something almost attractive in the curt directness of speech and manner that had seemed to repudiate the necessity for self-justification. That he had allowed himself to be deceived in this matter was entirely his own fault. It was only consistent with his record that the man should misuse the funds entrusted to him. And there was no redress possible because of the secret nature of the undertaking.

"It's a bad business," he said at last—"the worst bungle that has been made so far. The fellow is entirely unprincipled. A man of that unscrupulous order is capable of turning the knowledge he has acquired to his own account. I feel now that I shall never see those letters."

Simmonds did not feel particularly sanguine either. But he sought to encourage his chief.

"In a case where a man is governed by his passions, you can't tell," he said. "This escapade is possibly merely an interlude. He'll come up to the mark later."

His hearer did not look reassured.

"It's somewhat of a coincidence," he added, after a moment's reflection, "that a woman has stepped in in two instances to the frustrating of your plans."

Colonel Grey glanced up sharply.

"The other affair was a matter of outwitting," he said. "This is different altogether. We've put ourselves in the power of a rogue, and we shall have to pay for it—dearly."

"Yes."

Simmonds looked at the other inquiringly. The Colonel was staring hard at the light that stood on the table between them, swiftly revolving, in a mind much

given to scheming of late, plan after plan which, after a brief consideration, he put successively on one side as ineffectual or unfeasible. While he thought he smoked in a state of inward fume, oblivious of his companion altogether. It was very evident that the last check had hit him hard. He saw no opening for his next move.

"There is one thing fairly certain," he remarked at length, "we shall have to pull this off without assistance. Van Bleit knows we are both his enemies; we must fight openly. We can't trust this matter to other hands."

"I agree with you there," Simmonds answered. "You might keep all the rogues in the Colony. It's the soft sort of billet they would tumble to promptly. And there's no possible guarantee of good faith—save their word."

"Their word!" Colonel Grey repeated sourly. "Lawless passed me his word—and I accepted it."

He thought for a moment.

"One piece of information he gave me which may prove of service," he said, suddenly looking up. "Van Bleit carries the letters on his person—and a loaded revolver. I'm not scared of revolvers. I'd like to see this one of Van Bleit's at close range—here, in this room."

"You've got a plan?" said Simmonds interrogatively.

"Not much of one. . . . It may not work. We must get him here, if possible. . . . You must see him. . . . Ask him to come here to treat with me. . . . Tell him I've a new proposal to make. Then, when we've got him, we'll lock the door; and if there should be any firing, no one will be any the wiser—unless someone gets hurt."

"He won't come," Simmonds answered confidently.

"He's slim, is Van Bleit, and a coward—of the bullying sort. He'll scent danger."

"We can but try it," Colonel Grey said. And added grimly : "If we once get him inside this room he doesn't leave it until we get those letters."

Simmonds smiled drily.

"If I know anything of the man," he said, "he'll not bring them with him. He may carry them around as a rule, but he isn't at all likely to march into the enemy's camp with them. You forget Denzil's in this. He will leave the letters with him."

"He may do."

The Colonel spoke with a slight irritation, the result of discouragement. He had been many months striving to get hold of these papers, and he was no nearer success than when he first landed in Cape Town. The rogue he had to deal with was insatiable, unprincipled, and unrelenting. He had attempted in the first instance straightforward methods ; but Van Bleit, being possessed of a crooked mind, was suspicious of straightforward dealings, and he had been forced to resort to more subtle and underhand means. It was, he felt sure, by no open and honest device that he would prevail against him—if, indeed, he ever prevailed. To-night, baffled and disheartened, he believed that he would be forced to throw down the cards and acknowledge himself beaten.

"I'd give five years of my life," he said—"and my years are not so many now that I can spare them—to best that scoundrel. To think that a contemptible hound like that should have the power to intimidate anyone with a Damocles' sword in the form of a packet of damning letters ! The law of the land ought to permit one to shoot blackmailers on sight."

"I rather fancy the law—out here, anyway—would

bring it in manslaughter," Simmonds replied coolly. He knocked the ash out of his pipe. "Then, I understand you wish me to try to induce him to come here?"

"Yes, that's it."

The Colonel was still meditating on the unsatisfactoriness of the law.

"I'd bring it in justifiable homicide," he said at last.

XI

POOR little Julie Weeber was having a bad time of it. She was, to the scornful surprise of her family, which was neither sympathetic nor particularly wise in its mode of condemnation, grieving for a man who was utterly worthless. Her sister declared that she was wanting in proper pride, and her mother regarded her as a silly, sentimental child, and refused to consider the trouble seriously. So Julie nursed her heart-hunger in silence, and the round, young face grew thinner, the laughter died out of her eyes, and her lips lost the humorous twist that had made her many admirers want to kiss them. It was but a pale reflection of the old Julie they met at dances and parties, a Julie who would not flirt with them, and whose once ready repartee failed her utterly and left her with curiously little to say. She had been good sport once, and the youths with whom she had been popular found it difficult to realise the change. When they discovered that the change was enduring and not merely a passing mood, they deserted her for more amusing company, and Julie found herself neglected with a programme half filled at dances, and only one staunch ally to depend upon for an escort. The ally was Teddy Bolitho, whose great ambition was to earn a sufficient income on which to set up housekeeping, and to win Julie's consent to become mistress of his home. But the ambition was distant of fulfilment. Young Bolitho had as much as he could do to pay his modest way.

Julie liked Teddy Bolitho. Before the advent of Lawless she had liked him better than any man she had ever met. Bolitho had stood aside when the older man claimed her attention. It had been a blow for him, but he had taken it pluckily with his back against the wall. He had quickly recognised that he stood no chance against Lawless, who had everything in his favour so far as outward seeming went, and despite his successful rivalry, he entertained a half-reluctant liking for the man. It was not surprising that Julie should find him fascinating; and it would be a very much better match for her, he had decided, judging—as Julie's mother had judged when she encouraged Lawless to visit at the house—by externals.

And then had arisen the scandal concerning Lawless, and his subsequent disappearance; and Bolitho had quietly stepped out from the background, and taken his place again quite naturally at Julie's side. She accepted his action without comment. He was the only one in her world who understood. She felt instinctively that he did understand, that she could count on his sympathy, though neither by word nor sign did he allude to what was past; and she repaid him in the trust and regard of an earnest friendship, which is the next best thing to love. But an earnest friendship is not what a man covets from the girl who holds his heart. Bolitho was acquiring patience in the hard school of necessity; nevertheless, there were times when his spirit chafed sorely, times when he felt thoroughly disheartened and discouraged; despite the happy optimism of his nature, the outlook was not promising.

"I don't know why you bother about me," she said to him one evening at a dance, when he came upon her sitting out in a corner by herself. He had only just arrived, having been detained at the store, where they

were short-handed through the illness of a clerk. He had looked for Julie as soon as he entered the room, and caught sight of her in her corner looking wretched and forlorn. At her speech he sat down beside her, and, with a smile, possessed himself of her programme.

"It's curious that I should, isn't it?" he said. "But I've always been in the habit of pleasing myself. What are you going to give me, Julie?"

"Oh! anything you like," she answered dispiritedly. "You'll find any amount of blanks. I have spent most of the time so far adorning the walls."

He looked at her steadily.

"You do it very prettily," he answered.

"Thank you, Teddy."

She moved a little closer to him, and her face brightened.

"I don't mind now you've come," she said. "But I was feeling—hurt before. I've seen girls sitting out often—the dull ones, and I've felt, not so much sorry for them, as surprised that they couldn't get partners. Now I know what it feels like." Her eyes flashed with sudden anger. "It's beastly, the selfishness of people," she said with a note of disgust in her tones. "So long as you are amusing, or interesting, or pretty, you are wanted and sought after . . . you're popular; but lose your looks, or, worse still, your gift of amusing others, and you might as well be buried for all the attention you get. . . . You simply don't exist. The amusing person can always command friends, but the poor dull person who most needs friendship is invariably shunned. . . . Now I'm being bitter and hateful, and, perhaps, even you—— But I know you are not like that. . . . It was horrid of me to have said that. I'm often horrid now, Teddy. I get more horrid every day."

"Look here," he returned quickly, "I'm not dancing

with anyone—most of the girls have filled their cards by now. Every dance that you have open we'll have, or sit out, together, and those that you're fixed up for I'll dance with anyone I can discover who is sitting out. We'll square matters that way."

"Oh, Teddy! you are a good sort," she said.

She watched him while he marked his programme, comparing it with hers. He had reddened slightly at her words of approbation, but by the time he had finished pencilling his programme his embarrassment had vanished, and he returned her card with his usual cheerful smile.

"I've stolen all the blanks," he said. "You don't mind—if it's remarked?"

"No . . . I don't care," she answered stubbornly.

He rose and offered her his arm.

"We won't sit here inhaling the dust they're kicking up," he said. "There are one or two jolly little retreats, Julie, where we can talk at our ease."

She laughed.

"You always had a genius for discovery," she returned. As she took the proffered arm she gave it a little grateful squeeze. "Oh! I'm so glad to get out of this room."

Outside the ball-room they came face to face with Mrs. Lawless and Van Bleit. There was a block at the entrance. Many couples were leaving the room, and new-comers pressed forward, and for several minutes people were forcibly restrained in the narrow passage.

Mrs. Lawless looked searchingly into the young face, as she recognised the girl who had been Lawless' partner in the dance when they had been held up by the crowd as they were now. It was obvious that the girl also recognised her. The older woman smiled.

"It seems fated that we should meet in a crush," she said in her peculiarly soothing voice. "On the last

occasion we both were slightly damaged. May we have better luck this time."

Julie smiled back at her and flushed warmly. She felt strangely shy in the presence of this beautiful, composed woman, with the sweet voice and easy manner, and the so distressingly familiar name. But the owner of the familiar name looked gracious, and—Julie could not but notice it—sad, despite the ready smile. The girlish heart went out to her unquestioningly, recognising instinctively a common bond. She did not know why the lovely sun-flecked eyes held shadows, she only saw that the shadows were there, and felt drawn towards their owner in consequence. Her shyness left her suddenly. She drew her hand from Teddy Bolitho's arm, and shielded the other woman's body with two young, vigorous arms.

"You shall not be damaged this time," she said, and laughed.

Mrs. Lawless laughed with her.

"What a valiant champion you make," she said. "Trust a woman to protect a woman in any serious crisis."

And then the press suddenly ceased. Julie's arms fell to her side, and with a further smile of friendship and understanding, Mrs. Lawless passed on with her companion.

"Who is that girl?" she inquired as they passed through into the ball-room.

She was not dancing. She had merely come for an hour to look on; and she chose a seat not too far away from the exit, so that she could make her escape without inconvenience as soon as she desired. Van Bleit sat down beside her, and, following his customary tactics, sought by his impressive manner to draw attention to themselves. He was usually a daring wooer, but

Mrs. Lawless so baffled him that he was forced to resort to more insidious methods.

"The girl who embraced you ? . . . That's Miss Julie Weeber. . . . Quite a nice little thing. Not exactly in your set, you know."

She regarded him strangely.

"And the boy she was with ?"

Van Bleit laughed.

"Oh ! that's Bolitho, her faithful squire. He's clerk in a wool-store. Miss Weeber has slighted him of late, but he's in favour again apparently. She'd be well advised to stick to him."

"I like the look of him," said Mrs. Lawless slowly, "and I like her. I shall cultivate the acquaintance. If I were to remain so long, couldn't you manage that we sat together at supper ?"

Van Bleit would have contrived anything to have kept her longer at the dance. When she left it would be for home, he knew ; and it was never permitted him to accompany her on the homeward drive. He had several times suggested doing so, but he had always met with the same pleasant but firm refusal.

It was a surprise for Julie to find herself *tête-à-tête* with the beautiful Mrs. Lawless at supper. Van Bleit so managed matters that it appeared wholly accidental when he and his companion took the vacant seats opposite herself and young Bolitho, and he exerted himself to an unusual degree to make the meal a success. Julie was astonished at the fun she was getting out of the evening.

"Why, I'm really enjoying myself," she remarked naïvely in a pause between the laughter. "And I had feared it was going to be such a slow affair."

"At your age," Mrs. Lawless answered, "no dance should prove slow."

"That depends," retorted Julie. "But, of course, you've never experienced the pain of sitting out."

"I usually sit out," Mrs. Lawless answered. "I am no dancer. But there is pleasure in watching others enjoy themselves."

"Oh yes!" Julie replied. "Anyone could enjoy that when the sitting out wasn't compulsory."

"I see." Mrs. Lawless laughed. "A little discipline of that nature isn't exactly harmful," she said.

Julie laughed too.

"I always hated discipline," she said.

"I can't understand any girl sitting out," Van Bleit interposed. "That men can't find partners is common enough. There are plenty of fellows supporting the door-posts to-night."

"Yes; but they want amusing," Julie returned brightly. "They won't give their services for nothing."

"There is something very decadent in the sound of that," Mrs. Lawless remarked.

Before rising, she leaned across the table and addressed herself directly to the girl.

"Do you ever get as far as Rondebosch?" she asked.

"I get farther than that," Julie answered. "I cycle, you know."

"Then, take pity on my loneliness. I am an English-woman, unused to the Colony. Will you ride out to see me some day?"

"Of course I will. . . . Any time you wish."

"Come to-morrow. . . . I will be at home to no one else. . . ."

"Lucky little girl!" murmured Van Bleit, as he escorted Mrs. Lawless from the supper-room. "She enjoys a privilege that many would envy her. . . . You never ask *me* to visit you. . . ."

She looked at him steadily.

"Perhaps some day I shall do that," she answered, and smiled at him, a smile so kind and gentle that it set Van Bleit's heart beating high with expectation, and a hope he did not often dare to indulge.

When he had assisted her into her motor and shut the door upon her, he took the hand she extended to him and raised it to his lips. The car drove off and left him standing in the roadway, looking after it with a complacent smile widening the corners of his sensual mouth. Truly he had a way with women! He had never known any woman who could stand out against him for long.

As he turned and started to walk in the opposite direction from that taken by the car, a figure loomed suddenly out of the darkness and, with a word of greeting, came to a halt in front of him. Van Bleit recognised the sallow, bearded face, the darkness notwithstanding, and instinctively his right hand went to his breast pocket in a manner that brought a smile to the lips of the man who had accosted him. Recovering himself almost immediately, he feigned to be searching for his cigar-case, which eventually he produced, and leisurely proceeded to abstract a cigar therefrom. While thus employed, he replied to the brief salutation of the newcomer with the sarcastic observation:

"Still taking an interest in my movements, Mr. Simmonds? I thought your gang had tired of me."

"You pay yourself a poor compliment, Mr. Van Bleit," was the dry response. "The Colonel seems keener on your society just now than on any other. He'd like to see you. I've been hanging about outside this social ballet for some time with the express object of telling you so."

"A dull amusement," Van Bleit returned, lighting his cigar, "which you might have spared yourself.

Colonel Grey and I have given free vent to our opinions of one another sufficiently often to obviate the necessity of a repetition of our views. Mine have undergone no change—I doubt that his have.”

“I doubt it too,” Simmonds replied. “But this matter he has in mind has no bearing on his personal feelings. He has had a letter recalling him to England.”

“I’m glad of that at least,” said Van Bleit.

“There were other matters contained in the letter besides his recall which concern you,” Simmonds added. “He wishes to see you on the subject.”

“You may tell him from me,” Van Bleit answered rudely, “that his postal communications, as his movements, have not the slightest interest for me.”

He started to walk again. Simmonds, wholly unmoved, walked beside him.

“You speak without knowledge, Mr. Van Bleit,” he said. “The instructions contained in this imperative and important letter concern you very particularly. Colonel Grey has a further proposal to lay before you, which you will be well advised to consider. Failing a satisfactory issue to these final negotiations, he is instructed to place the matter in the hands of the police and return to England.”

Van Bleit, his assurance notwithstanding, was taken aback. He had not foreseen this move, and was totally unprepared for it. It was merely bluff, he told himself, and really believed it was so; but at the back of the belief lurked the fear that his victim might have grown reckless, and, with the courage that is sometimes born of despair, be prepared to face the worst.

“Faugh!” he exclaimed impatiently. “That’s an old dodge.” But his voice had lost its confidence and resumed its natural bullying tones. “Go and tell your chief to do his worst, and be damned to him!”

"Go and tell him yourself," returned Simmonds. "You could at least then hear what he has to say."

"And how do I know you are not up to some treachery?" demanded Van Bleit, his suspicions at once on the alert.

"I suppose it is natural you should judge other men by your own standard," Simmonds answered indifferently. "If you are afraid we may arrange a trap, why not go and see him to-night when he is unprepared for your visit?"

"What makes you so confident we should find him at home?" Van Bleit asked quickly.

"Because, until I set out to look for you, I was seated on his stoep with him, smoking."

—"And discussing me?"

"And discussing the letter and its conditions as they concerned you—yes."

"He keeps late hours if he is out of bed when we get there," Van Bleit remarked. "It's after midnight."

Simmonds, who had been instructed to fetch Van Bleit to the bungalow that night if possible, with difficulty repressed a smile.

"I imagine he does keep late hours," he said. "The only occasions I have surprised him in bed have been in the daytime. But if he were abed I don't doubt he would see you. Nevertheless, if you prefer some other time, I am sure it will be equally convenient to him."

"And if I refuse to go at all?"

"Then, I expect he will drop down on you. You see his instructions are imperative. He has no voice in the matter."

Van Bleit swung round suddenly and stared in the other's face.

"It's a game of bluff you're playing," he said. "I don't trust you. I'll go with you to-night—yes. I'll

hear the proposal this precious letter contains. But, remember, I'm armed, and I shan't hesitate to use my weapon if I see the slightest occasion."

"You may reassure yourself. Great as you know our interest in you to be," Simmonds replied imperturbably, "I don't suppose either of us covets the distinction of hanging for you."

XII

KARL VAN BLEIT was neither popular nor especially respected among his fellows, nevertheless a sensation that had in it something of consternation supervened when the news burst like a bomb over Cape Town that he had been arrested on a charge of murder. His connection with the Smythes added considerably to the interest, and lent a social importance to the affair. Speculation was rife concerning the crime, the details of which were tardy in forthcoming ; only the barest facts were known, and these were sufficiently unusual to strain public curiosity to the utmost. A sense of mystery enveloped the affair : the lonely bungalow ; the hour ; the unexplained connection between the three men, who had met by arrangement seemingly, for what reason had not transpired ; the shooting affray, in which one man, Simmonds, had been killed ; and finally the arrest of Van Bleit, who had on leaving the bungalow walked into town and given himself up to the authorities.

The whole business was, in the opinion of Theodore Smythe, worthy the shady character of his wife's undesirable connection. Out of a feeling of delicacy he kept the verbal expression of his views from her. He did his utmost to console her ; for she was not only inexpressibly shocked, but acutely alive to the danger of Van Bleit's position. He even promised to secure for his defence the best services that money could procure. But he entertained no great belief that Karl would get out of the present mess. He had been extraordinarily

lucky hitherto through a career of suspected crime ; nothing beyond suspicion had clung to him ; but it seemed as though this time at least the law had got its iron grip on him and would not be likely to let go. Putting his wife's feelings out of the question, Smythe had a distinct dislike to the idea of a connection of his own suffering the penalty of the law.

" It's such a beastly low-down, undignified position," he complained.

Mrs. Lawless read the news while she lingered over her breakfast. The midnight tragedy had already been seized upon to fill a column of the daily paper. Her face turned paler as she read, and the hand that held the newspaper was not quite steady. When she had read to the last line she laid the paper down beside her plate and sat staring out at the sunshine with wide startled eyes. . . . Murder ! . . . There was something terrible in the mere sight of the word in print—something horribly revolting. Could it be possible that this man with whom she had talked so often, who had touched her with his hands, was guilty of this foul crime ? She shivered at the mere remembrance that only the night before he had held her hand and touched it with his lips. He had parted from her and had gone straightway and done this thing. . . . What violent deeds men who engage in desperate ventures will commit ! . . .

She rose from the table, and leaving her unfinished breakfast, went out into the garden. The news had shocked her. She looked like a woman who is frightened and at the same time infinitely relieved. As she paced up and down beneath the trees that cast their pleasant shade upon the path, one thought kept beating upon her brain with an insistence that drove out every other thought and lulled a long-endured pain at her heart

like some blessed anodyne. She smiled as she looked up into the green tracery above her head.

"If she by her evil influence over him has saved him from danger," her thought ran, "then I am grateful to her for coming into his life."

And so she put behind her her jealousy of the woman who for the present dominated Lawless' life.

Later in the morning Mrs. Lawless ordered the car and drove into Cape Town to call on her friend.

She found Mrs. Smythe reclining on a cane lounge on the stoep, a book beside her, which she was not reading, and the morning paper open at the page with the gruesome headline lying in her lap. She looked round as Zoë Lawless mounted the steps, and seeing who it was, got up and went to meet her.

"Oh! how good of you to come," she said. "I have been thinking of you. . . . Zoë, isn't it awful? . . . I can't believe it. I can scarcely realise it yet."

Tears rose in her eyes, already spoiled with futile weeping for a man so little worthy of her grief. She dabbed at them ineffectually with a wet handkerchief, and added with unconscious absurdity:

"Karl couldn't have done it. . . . He wouldn't hurt a fly."

Mrs. Lawless put her hands upon her shoulders, and bending from her superior height, kissed the tremulous mouth.

"Poor Kate!" she said, and led her gently back to her seat.

"I feel," said Mrs. Smythe plaintively, "as though he were dead already . . . as though he, and not the other man, had met with a violent end. Oh! surely he will be able to explain. . . . They were two to one. . . . What could they have wanted with him? And why were they armed? Men who are peaceable citizens

don't carry firearms. Karl must have distrusted them to take a revolver with him. . . . And yet, Colonel Grey——"

She broke off suddenly, and added in a voice of puzzled questioning :

"Zoë, you never liked Colonel Grey!"

Mrs. Lawless leant back in a chair, her chin tilted slightly upward, gazing into the remote blueness of the sky. The flicker of a smile shone in the dark eyes, but the gravity of her features remained otherwise unchanged.

"That isn't quite a correct statement," she said. "As I told you before, it is Colonel Grey who doesn't like me."

Mrs. Smythe regarded her doubtfully.

"I thought you were joking when you said that," she replied. "If you really believe it, I think you are mistaken. He has often spoken of you, and it seemed to me that he greatly admires you. It is a strange thing to say in face of what has happened, but I always felt he was a man to be trusted."

"You can't be certain," replied Zoë, "that your first impression of him is wrong. Quarrels between men—even violent quarrels—don't necessarily make them rogues. I feel the same about him. I think he is an eminently trustworthy person."

"But," objected Mrs. Smythe, "there is this affair with Karl. . . . Karl always disliked him—he was rude to him once in this house. He made me angry, I remember, poor fellow!"

She sighed and again dabbed at her eyes with her ruined pocket-handkerchief.

"We've been more like brother and sister than cousins," she explained apologetically. "He has confided his troubles to me since he was a boy, and now in this great trouble I can't even help."

She did not think it necessary to explain that in those early days, when he was an impecunious young man and she a good-looking girl with a larger dowry than most girls, he had expended much time and eloquence in endeavouring to persuade her to accept his name in exchange for her fortune. She had believed then in the honesty of his professions of love, though she had felt too sisterly towards him to yield to his wishes; and it had been her one desire ever since her own happy marriage to see him happily married also. In Mrs. Lawless she believed she had found a worthy mate for him.

"Zoë," she exclaimed suddenly, turning appealingly towards her friend, "you won't let this shocking affair prejudice you against the poor boy! He may be able to justify himself. I can't believe that there isn't some explanation. It seems a horrible gigantic mistake. . . . You won't be prejudiced, will you?" she pleaded.

"I am not prejudiced, Kate," the other answered.

There was in the steady voice, in the expression of the composed face, so little encouragement to be read that Mrs. Smythe for the first time entertained serious doubts of Karl's success. She had imagined that his suit was prospering satisfactorily; now, like a further darkening of the already dark cloud that depressed her spirit, it was borne in upon her consciousness that Zoë Lawless did not love him. She could not love him and remain so entirely unmoved in face of the awful fate that overshadowed him.

"Of course," she went on, still more dejectedly, for her heart was sorely troubled, "no woman cares to have her name mixed up in a scandal like this. It would be only a great love that could live through such an ordeal. I suppose I'm foolish, Zoë, but I had hoped——"

She paused, unable to complete the sentence, and surveyed the dark glowing beauty of her silent companion with added distress in her eyes.

"Oh, Zoë!" she burst out impulsively. "He thinks the world of you. . . . There's a new quality comes into his voice whenever he speaks of you. You are the sunshine of the land to him—it's his own phrase. If he thought he stood no chance of winning you, I don't believe he would attempt to defend himself against this awful charge—I truly don't."

A wave of colour swept over Zoë Lawless' face, but beyond the swift blush she showed no sign of embarrassment.

"My dear," she said, "you are mistaken—utterly mistaken."

"How can I be mistaken, Zoë, when I had it from his own lips? He would never forgive me for telling you. . . . And, indeed, I ought to have held my peace. He could tell you so much more convincingly himself. I'm a fool to have spoken. . . . It's the wrong time to speak of such things. But my mind's so full of him, poor boy!"

Mrs. Lawless got up, and stooping over her chair kissed her affectionately.

"Don't worry. You have done no harm," she said. "If anyone could plead for him it would be you, you kind, dear soul. You make me feel——" She hesitated, and straightening herself stood slowly upright, looking gravely into the lifted face,—“mean,” she added, after a pause.

She clasped her hands behind her, and turning her back to the puzzled, questioning, tear-swollen eyes that stared up at her in helpless wonderment, gazed out upon the view. Through a break in the trees the great square rock that is Table Mountain showed in the clear

atmosphere so surprisingly near that it seemed as though it formed a boundary to the garden. The sunlight lay warmly on its rugged prominences leaving the clefts and crannies in its grey sides cold and dark and secretive, the lurking-places of mystery and shadows, hiding ever from the light like the evil thoughts of a man's mind. Zoë Lawless gazed at the mountain, looking blue in the brilliant sunshine, and her eyes were clouded as the dark clefts in its sides. She was ashamed of the part she had deliberately played, ashamed above all of having deceived this woman who was her friend.

"I'm wondering what you are thinking of me," she said quickly. "And it hurts. I care . . . so much. You tempt me to tell you things—things that I keep double-locked in my heart—in order to justify myself."

She turned round suddenly, frowning, and tapped her foot impatiently on the stone floor of the stoep.

"Merely to justify myself!" she repeated. . . . "Was ever a more paltry reason given than that? Shall I tell you, Kate? . . . Shall I show you the wound in my breast . . . the ugly, raw, unhealing wound that I am for ever tearing open with my own hand? I would tell you what I would not tell another human being sooner than you should think ill of me."

"If that is your only reason for giving me your confidence, there is no need," the other answered. "It's just because I think so highly of you, Zoë, that I feel the disappointment so keenly. But perhaps it's as well that you don't care, because . . . in the event of . . ."

Here she broke down completely, her thoughts so charged with gruesome possibilities that Mrs. Lawless' efforts at reassurance were futile. It was impossible, she declared, to accept comfort with the idea of the hangman's rope ever present in her mind.

"I'm waiting for Theo to come up from town," she

said tearfully. "He's gone to interview lawyers and barristers, and anyone who is likely to be able to help. Thank Heaven the assizes are on this month! I don't know how I should bear a longer suspense."

Mr. Smythe reached home as Mrs. Lawless was driving away. She stopped the car when she saw him, and he got out of the taxi he had driven up from town in and went to speak to her.

"You've been with Kate," he said. "I'm glad of that. She's horribly cut up, poor girl! It's a bad business . . . very. Looks black for Karl."

"You think"—Mrs. Lawless shivered involuntarily—"that he won't be able to clear himself?"

At sight of the shiver and her white face he remembered her friendly relations with Van Bleit, and hesitated to give free expression to his thoughts.

"Oh! I don't know," he said. . . . "You see, we know so little. The only thing that is positive is that he killed the man. . . . He admits it. But men have done that before, you know, and haven't swung for it. We won't look on the worst side until we've got to."

She realised that his desire was to spare her feelings, and a soft blush mantled her cheeks at the knowledge of what he was thinking.

"I'm not Kate," she said quietly. "I wish you wouldn't hold out hopes you don't in the least entertain. You are afraid the case will go against him. . . . Why don't you say so frankly?"

"Because," he answered jerkily, "I've got no grounds for supposing anything of the sort. But I've been interviewing men this morning whose business it is to see the more serious side, and it doesn't tend to reassure one. Don't let that worry you, though, Mrs. Lawless; we are going to do the best we can for him."

Again the swift rush of embarrassed colour warmed

her face. The tell-tale crimson strengthened his misapprehension. He fell to wondering what women saw in Van Bleit that won their liking. His wife's partiality for her cousin was the greatest unsolved puzzle of his life.

"We'll do our best," he repeated, wishful to allay her anxiety. "If it wasn't for Grey. . . . It'll be rather like two dogs worrying over a bone. It will be interesting to see who wins. The odds are against us. . . . But we'll do our best."

That phrase rang in Zoë Lawless' ears like a refrain as she drove on. . . . "We'll do our best." . . . So Theodore Smythe, as well as his wife, imagined that Karl Van Bleit's danger mattered to her. He had sought to hearten her with encouraging words; the very pressure of his hand when he bade her good-bye had conveyed a silent kindly sympathy, and his smile was meant to be reassuring. Apart from the shock the news had occasioned her, Van Bleit's danger concerned her no more than the danger of the man in the street. Yet she by her actions had led these people to the inference they had drawn.

She frowned as the car spun along the dusty road, under the huge straggling trees that lined it on either side, and waved their long gaunt arms musically in the wind. It troubled her to remember now, in face of all that had happened, that she had stooped to such deception, even though her motive had not been entirely unworthy. She had taken advantage of Van Bleit's attitude towards herself, had sought deliberately—as some women seek from motives of vanity—to attain an influence over him, and she had succeeded so far beyond her expectation. Her object had been to get possession of the letters that men were risking and sacrificing their lives to obtain. She had meant to

destroy the letters had they come into her possession, and so put it out of the power of any man to turn them to his own use. In the accomplishment of this her one hope had been to save from danger the man who had so recklessly, for a sordid compensation, undertaken their recovery. Van Bleit's feelings, as also to what extent she would have to lower her pride in the pursuance of her project, had scarcely been taken into consideration. All that had seemed up to now beside the main issue. But now things had undergone a change, and the man for whose sake she had been willing to sacrifice her own prejudices, had gone out of her life, slaying by his own act all possible hope of intercourse between them in the future. . . .

She leant back in her seat, and closed her eyes to the sunshine, the garish, laughing, intrusive sunshine that seemed to mock her pain. She was mourning for him, setting up a headstone to him in her memory; for he was as dead to her as though Van Bleit's bullet after effecting its deed of violence had sped through the darkness and spent itself in his heart. And upon the headstone she inscribed the one word "Waste."

XIII

MRS. LAWLESS was like a sick woman whose illness increased as the day advanced. She had recognised the finality of things on the night when Lawless walked out of her presence—out of her house, to return to the woman with whose lot he had thrown in his own. It was another of the mad, reckless acts that had governed his undisciplined nature. But to-day, with her mind disturbed with thoughts of death and deeds of violence, the memory of how she had let him go without exerting every effort to persuade him to reconsider his decision troubled her greatly. Why had she not humbled her pride and pleaded with him? . . . Why had she let the thought that it would be derogatory to her dignity deter her from freely avowing her love for him? . . . Might not the strength of her love have stood between him and this evil? . . . She felt as though hers had been the hand to thrust him forth into the darkness for the second time. Once before, in the years that were gone, she had thrust him forth; and in the empty years that had succeeded she had learnt bitterly to regret the hard unforgivingness of that act. Her one cry then had been: "I didn't understand. . . . Oh! if only I could have the chance again." The opportunity had been given her, and she had failed to recognise it. "He was so cold," she excused herself. "I was afraid of him." And then: "I could not have prevented him from doing what he had made up his mind to do. . . . My power over him is dead. . . ."

In that knowledge lay the bitterness of the sting. . . .

In the afternoon, according to her promise, Julie Weeber arrived. She was somewhat diffident of intruding, uncertain how Mrs. Lawless felt the news of Van Bleit's arrest. Julie shared the popular belief that it would be a grievous shock to the woman whose name had been bandied about in connection with his for months. To make sure, she inquired of the native who opened the door to her whether Mrs. Lawless were receiving.

"I would come another day, if it were more convenient," she said.

"Missis is expecting you," he answered, and showed her into the drawing-room.

Zoë Lawless was seated in a low chair near one of the windows, with her hands lying idly in her lap. She was very pale. Julie decided that she looked ill, and imagined that she understood the reason of her pallor.

"I came," she explained, "because I said I would. But if you'd rather have me some other day, I'll go away again."

"I'd rather that you stayed," Mrs. Lawless answered, rising and shaking hands. "You see, I'm lonely. Why should you condemn me to my own society to-day?"

"I thought perhaps——"

Julie stammered and came upon an awkward pause, whereupon Mrs. Lawless went quickly to her assistance.

"I know," she said. "This shocking news is all so fresh. But, obviously, I cannot assist my friends by becoming a recluse, can I? We won't speak of the subject, if you don't mind. It is sufficiently painful to make the discussion of it depressing. My sympathy with Mrs. Smythe is great. She is very fond of her cousin, and feels this deeply. And I am very fond of

her. . . . Sit here—will you?—with your back to the light. It's more restful."

Julie sat down wondering. She was beginning to reconstruct her ideas. There was nothing in Mrs. Lawless' manner to bear out the supposition that she was in love with Van Bleit. She did not suspect that Mrs. Lawless was intentionally correcting her error, nor did she guess how her assumption of the truth of the common report embarrassed her hostess. This ugly misapprehension had struck at her on three separate occasions that day. It was strange that she had not realised before the construction that might be put on her friendship with Van Bleit. She wondered whether Lawless had shared the same belief. And then she remembered how in her first interview with him he had warned her against the man. Why, if he was so entirely indifferent, need he have concerned himself about her acquaintance? . . .

She looked up suddenly and surprised Julie's inquisitive eyes studying her intently. The girl smiled.

"It's awfully sweet of you to have asked me to come and see you," she said. "I've wanted to know you—oh! for ever so long."

"Why?"

"I don't know—unless it is because you are so beautiful. Women do admire other women whatever's said to the contrary. I've watched you motoring past our house. . . . I saw you pass this morning."

She did not add that she had thought how sad she looked.

"Yes," Mrs. Lawless answered. "I went to see Mrs. Smythe. If my thoughts had not been so occupied with other matters I would have stopped and driven you out with me then. It's rather selfish to let you cycle out here when I have a car."

"Oh no!" Julie contradicted eagerly. "I make nothing of this journey."

"Nevertheless, I shall drive you next time. I want you to come out often. You play tennis, of course? There is a beautiful lawn there—wasting. . . . Nobody plays on it."

She pointed through the window to a stretch of green sward which the Hottentot gardener kept surreptitiously watered during the dry season, so that whatever else suffered from the long droughts the grass was always green.

"I should like that," Julie said. "Do you play?"

"Not much. I'm a lazy person. But I have thought I should like to get a few young people out for a game occasionally. I enjoy looking on. If you would bring Mr. Bolitho, I could manage to make up the numbers."

Julie did not answer immediately. She sat looking out into the garden with heightened colour and vaguely perplexed eyes. She wondered why Mrs. Lawless should have singled out Teddy Bolitho from the host of young men who would all have been willing to come. She wished that she had mentioned any name rather than his.

"You don't like my plan?" Mrs. Lawless said quietly.

Julie looked up.

"Yes. . . . Yes, I do," she said. "I was only—thinking. Of course Teddy Bolitho would come—anybody would, if you asked them. And it's heavenly playing on a grass court; there are so few in the Colony. It'll spoil it, though."

"I would rather it were spoilt with use than wasted," Mrs. Lawless said. . . . "We waste so much."

She had risen, and now, moving nearer to the girl, she laid a strong, well-shaped hand upon her shoulder.

"Don't you make waste too," she added gently. "I did when I was young . . . and it leaves me full of vain regrets. Some people think that youth is the best gift of the gods: but it is far from a perfect gift; for the proper appreciation of it is withheld. It is only when the gift is withdrawn that we realise all that it meant. If one could have one's youth a second time, one would get the full value of the hours. You've got it now—that priceless gift; and you are inclined to be careless of it."

"I wonder why you say this to me?" Julie murmured.

"Because I've been looking on. You say you have observed me. . . . Interest is usually mutual. I have certainly felt interested in you."

Julie coloured awkwardly, and looked down. She wondered whether Mrs. Lawless had observed her friendship for the man whose name was the same as her own, and if she disapproved of it.

"I don't think it altogether depends on oneself what one makes of one's youth," she said.

"There is much to be said for that argument," Mrs. Lawless answered. "But I could wish you had not found it out so soon."

Julie looked up quickly.

"You mustn't pity me," she said. "I wouldn't retrace one step of the past. . . . It's the future I would alter, if I could."

"And how can you tell," Mrs. Lawless inquired, "what the future holds?"

The girl smiled drearily.

"I know very well what it doesn't hold," she answered. "That's as far as I care to go."

And then suddenly her wandering gaze fell on a photograph that stood in a silver frame on the piano, and she became silent, regarding it with an intensity

that drew Mrs. Lawless' eyes to the object that excited her interest.

"You recognise it?" she said, and there was a quality in her voice such as Julie had never heard in any voice before. "That was taken before—he left the Army."

It was a portrait of Lawless in regimentals, younger and handsomer than the man Julie knew; but there was lacking in the younger face something which the older face possessed. Julie could not determine what that something was.

"Yes, I recognise it. . . . But I miss—the scar," she said.

She blushed violently. It was the scar that had appealed so strongly to her youthful imagination. And then, raising her glance furtively to see whether her embarrassment were observed, she was profoundly disconcerted at the sight of the tears that were standing in the other woman's eyes. Mrs. Lawless moved away.

"I don't know," she said, "why I put that portrait there to-day. . . . There's a connection, I suppose, between it and one's wasted youth. The portrait stands for waste. . . . It is the sight of it that has set me thinking back."

She crossed to the piano and lifted the frame as though her purpose were to remove it. Then, changing her mind, she set it again in its place, and came slowly back.

"I wonder what you think of my getting you here and depressing you with my reminiscences," she said in a lighter tone. "It wasn't my intention. I suppose it's due to reaction following the shock of recent events. We'll flee from gloomy subjects, shall we? . . . Come out with me. I want to show you my garden. . . ."

Whether it was owing to Mrs. Lawless' display of emotion, or the unexpected sight of the photograph in her room, or to both reasons combined, added to the strange new quality in her voice when she spoke of the portrait's original, Julie conceived the idea that she too loved this man with the dominating personality,—the strangely aloof manner,—the air of quiet detachment that made him at once a figure attractive and unapproachable, so that women, while desirous of knowing him, hesitated to solicit an introduction. It was not strange that she should love him—that to Julie was a natural, almost an inevitable, consequence of knowing him—but it was incredible that he could remain indifferent to her regard. The only explanation she could arrive at was that he was ignorant of it. Julie understood at last the tragedy that occasionally looked out from Mrs. Lawless' beautiful eyes; and in her sympathy with her the pain at her own heart grew less. She had no thought of competing against this peerlessly lovely woman. It was unaccountable to her by the light of her new understanding that Lawless should have troubled to show any interest in her at all. She wondered whether, if she ever saw him again, she would find the courage to tell him the secret she had surprised. . . .

That evening, after Julie had left her, Mrs. Lawless took the portrait of Lawless from the piano, and sat with it in her hands examining it closely. She was wondering whether the woman he had gone away with now was the same woman he had wrecked his happiness for eight years ago—wondering in a quite impersonal, dulled sort of way. The thing was past remedying and altogether beyond her control. She remembered that in the past it had been the wound to her self-esteem she had felt the most bitterly. Her feelings had changed during

the long years. She experienced little of the grief, the anger, the disgust that had moved her then. Her present sorrow was less a selfish emotion than sorrow for the man because of the waste he was making of life. She scarcely considered the woman outside her connection with Lawless, save, after the tragedy of the previous night, to be relieved that, since she was to influence him, she had removed him from other influences of a more actively dangerous nature. She was glad that he was out of Cape Town, otherwise she knew he would have been concerned in the affair that had cost one life and might yet cost another.

And while she sat there musing on these matters with the photograph in her hands, the door of the room opened, and to her astonishment Colonel Grey was announced. He followed quickly on his name, as though anticipating and anxious to prevent a refusal on her part to receive him, offering an apology for intruding on her as he entered.

Mrs. Lawless laid the photograph face downwards on the sofa and rose to greet him. Her face expressed her surprise ; his was grey and tired and haggard, and his blood-shot eyes looked like the eyes of a man who has not slept.

"I fear I have disturbed you," he said. "I'm sorry to intrude, but I wish to see you."

"You have disturbed me doing nothing," she answered composedly. "I was wearied of my thoughts. Sit down and tell me what you wanted to see me for. . . . Will you take anything?" she added, on a sudden thought, as he dropped wearily into a chair. "You look tired."

"Thank you, no," he answered. "I am less tired than worried. But I won't distress you by going into that. I quite understand that the subject is painful to

you, and for that reason I regret to inflict my company on you."

Mrs. Lawless looked slightly impatient. This man too! . . . Was everyone she met to say the same thing to her, only in different words?

"Please disabuse your mind of any such impression," she said. "Of course I feel sympathy with the trouble of my friends, but your presence cannot possibly increase my distress. Why should it?"

"I feared you might hold me responsible for what has occurred," he said simply. "And the sight of me cannot fail to call up painful thoughts. I do not profess to be other than an enemy of the man you regard as a friend. You know too much of the matter for me to impose on you—even if I wished to do so. I can only say that I regret that our interests are opposed."

She smiled faintly.

"You take rather much for granted, I think," she said. "Why should you suppose I am interested in the matter at all? Women do not usually meddle in such dangerous and discreditable enterprises—you will forgive me for speaking of this as I feel. . . . I cannot see that it is creditable to be concerned in this business of yours."

"Perhaps not," he said. "But then, again, perhaps you don't fully understand. And aren't you judging a little by results?"

"I think it is reasonable to draw conclusions from results in most instances," she answered.

"From final results," he returned. . . . "But not at this stage."

"I had hoped this was the last stage," she said.

"I had hoped it might be," he returned with some grimness of manner. . . . "But we haven't won yet."

"Nor lost? . . ."

"We can't lose, Mrs. Lawless. It has to be a fight to the finish."

He regarded her fixedly. As was usual when in her presence, the distrust which he entertained for her at other times vanished to yield to a liking and confidence which he admitted with some reluctance, but which he was unable to subdue. Hers was a magnetic personality, and this in conjunction with her beauty robbed a man of his wits. At his age he should be impervious to the charm of women. But man is never too old to be influenced by the sex.

"It's rather a big check we've come upon," he resumed, after a momentary pause. "I'm sadly in need of assistance. . . . That's why I have come to you."

She opened her eyes wide in astonishment.

"You never supposed that I might assist you?" she said.

"I am hoping you will," he answered . . . "in a way in which only you can. I want you—if you will be so kind—to furnish me with Mr. Lawless' present address. He ought to be here, on the spot."

She sat very still for a while, looking beyond him out through the window.

"Isn't one broken head and one life sufficient?" she asked presently in a low, strangely controlled, unemotional voice. "It seems to me that your view of things is out of proportion, Colonel Grey, when you can sacrifice the lives of men for a packet of scandalous letters."

"That means," he said, "that you decline to give me the information?"

"I have not the information to give," she answered with dignity.—"I should certainly not give it, if I had."

. . . My one fear is that Mr. Lawless will hear of this affair and return."

"I could wish I shared your belief," he replied. "But I fancy you may ease your mind on that score. . . . And there is less danger in this than you imagine . . . the dog that bites is chained."

He eyed her narrowly as he referred thus to Van Bleit's arrest; but he could make nothing of the calm, unchanging face, the quiet eyes that looked steadily back into his.

"You hate that man," she said slowly. "You will—hang him, if you can."

He sat forward and peered at her queerly from under his bent brows. He had half expected when he went there that evening that she would make an appeal to his clemency on behalf of the man against whom he would appear as principal witness. That she did not, spoke well for her pride and self-control. Such courage and restraint moved him to admiration. She hid her feelings magnificently, he decided, ignorant of how little she had to conceal.

"You think so," he said, rising, and standing, hat in hand, in front of her, preparatory to taking his leave after his fruitless errand. "I should have thought you might have perceived that until I have got possession of the letters I have nothing to gain by his death. Denzil has the packet in his keeping, I believe. If I can get hold of it before the case comes on, Van Bleit shall account for the life he has taken."

"And that is your reason for coming to me for the address?" she observed.

"That," he answered bluntly, "is my reason. I want Grit Lawless for the job."

XIV

IN a lonely shanty on the veld, twenty good miles from the nearest town, Lawless took up his quarters with the woman in whose society he had left Cape Town. The shanty was of corrugated iron lined with planks, and consisted of two small bedrooms and a living-room, divided from one another by matchboard partitions. There were primitive out-buildings that had served a former occupier for stables, and a disused mud hut stood in a sort of blank isolation some quarter of a mile distant. Behind the hut on steeply shelving ground was densely wooded cover, the only sign of shade in the whole picture. The hut had been used by natives apparently quite recently. The wooden blocks, curved to fit the neck, that serve the black man for pillow, stood on the ground. These blocks were joined together by a wooden chain, as is the marital custom of the land. Beside them was a worn and dirty blanket, and a calabash and mealie stamper lay against the wall close to the doorless opening. This primitive native home, with its rude implements and poor accommodation, was seemingly deserted. Probably the coloured occupants, having no lawful possession of the place, had fled precipitately at the coming of strangers who might question their right to be there, and were doubtless watching at no great distance until the white man should depart, as he always departed after the briefest of sojourns in that lonely spot. That they would return eventually was certain ; no native, save under compulsion, vacates a place and leaves his blanket behind.

Lawless and his companion settled into their temporary home and proceeded to do for themselves. The woman set the house to rights, while Lawless stabled the horses he had hired from the town, and went out to gather wood to make a fire. When he had collected a sufficient quantity, he returned to the house, piled the logs upon the hearth, and set light to them. They had brought provisions with them, and he filled a new tin kettle from his water-bag and set it on the flames. The woman emerged from the bedroom while he knelt upon the hearth, and stood in the doorway watching him with a light of admiration in her eyes.

"Say, baas, there are no sheets to the beds," she drawled,— "nor blankets."

He was intent on his occupation, and did not look round.

"Damn it!" he muttered. "I never thought of that. . . . Of course not. . . . We'll have to sleep in our clothes."

"Been jumped, I expect," she said.

"Very likely. What an ass I was not to come better prepared."

"Oh! what does it matter?" she returned. "We've both roughed it before. It's a picnic. Get up, Grit. The cooking's my department. You unpack the food stuff. I tumbled on a gridiron under one of the beds. It's a bit rusty, but I'll clean it in the flame; then we'll cook some of those chops you bought. I'm hungry."

He was hungry also, and he fell to with appetite, the roughness of the fare notwithstanding, when she placed the fizzling chops on a tin plate and brought them to the table. He cleared a space for them, and cut a chunk of bread from the loaf for himself and another for her, while she made the tea. Then they sat down to the first meal in their new quarters.

It was a silent meal. They were too hungry to talk,

and both were tired after a long day in the saddle. It was more than three weeks since they had left Cape Town. They had stayed at different places, until, hearing of the shanty from a man in Stellenbosch, who was anxious to let it, and who told wonderful fairy-tales of the sport to be enjoyed in the neighbourhood, Lawless had decided to take it, and having paid the first month's rent in advance, bought provisions and hired horses and set out with his companion to take possession of what the owner described as a comfortably furnished shooting-box. Comfort is largely a matter of comparison. Lawless had roughed it often, had fared worse, and been worse housed; but his new surroundings depressed him. It was probably the contrast between them and the recent comfort he had enjoyed that forced home the sordidness of the present life.

When they had supped he dragged his chair nearer the doorway and sat smoking, while the woman cleared away the remains of their meal. She joined him when she had finished her task, drawing up a chair opposite to his on the other side of the opening. Then she took a packet of cigarette-papers and tobacco from her pocket, and rolled herself a cigarette.

"You are dull, dear boy," she remarked, as she caught the box of matches which Lawless tossed her in silence. "You are a man of action, and the solitudes are not to your taste. This life is the silly sort of mistake made by most honeymooners."

Lawless looked across at her, a queer expression in his eyes. In the dim light, which mercifully concealed the thickness of the paint upon her face, she was really strikingly handsome. She looked younger than she appeared in the daytime.

"You ought always to sit in the twilight," he said with brutal frankness.

She laughed good-naturedly.

"If you pay me compliments like that, Hughie, you'll make me vain," she said.

She drew at her cigarette, inhaling the smoke and discharging it through her nostrils. He watched her with an odd feeling of disgust. The bond between them was peculiar. The affection was without doubt stronger on her side than on his. But he ungrudgingly admitted she made a man a capital chum; and since throwing in his lot with hers he was keenly alive to the fact that many men envied him his possession. It had been a source of much annoyance to him, and of great gratification to Tottie, that she had been the object of offensive admiration at every place they visited. She had declared that it was because he was jealous that he determined to bury her in the wilds of the veld.

"You are the type of man who would be capable of murdering a woman, Grit," she said.

"There you are mistaken," he had answered. "If a woman once washed her hands of me, I should simply have done with her."

"One can't turn one's back on an incident so as to forget it altogether," she had objected.

"For the matter of that," he had returned, "a man can't command memory, but he can so put a thing out of mind that it ceases to disturb him."

"Then, if ever I chance to elope with Van Bleit," Tottie had flung at him audaciously, "I shall have the satisfaction of knowing my memory is relegated to the ashbin. . . ."

They sat on until the light failed and darkness settled upon the veld, closing about them stealthily, and shutting out the immensity of the endless stretch of treeless waste that was all that could be seen from the house, a wide expanse of undulating veld held in the blue hollow

of the sky. The darkness crept closer. It shut out the face of each from the other's view. A small red glow marked where Tottie still held a cigarette between her painted lips, and a larger duller glow shone from the bowl of Lawless' pipe.

"The moon will be up in a short while," he said abruptly, and the words, quietly as he had spoken, snapped the silence almost violently, as a voice raised above a whisper in a death-chamber might do. "Shall we stay and see it rise?"

"Yes, if you like."

She flung the end of her cigarette out into the darkness, and watched it where it lay like a somewhat fiery glow-worm until it smouldered out.

And then slowly the darkness began less to roll away than to disclose itself. Black objects stood out dimly from the shade, and the line of the horizon defined itself and almost imperceptibly, so gradual was the change, grew lighter. Tones of colour appeared in the picture; the black melted into purple, so rich and deep as to seem more dense than the sombre shade it superseded. And then abruptly the scene brightened. A soft yellow glow appeared in the sky, and the inverted curve of a blood-red moon showed above the horizon.

Lawless stood up, and knocking the ash from his pipe, leant with his shoulder pressed against the framework of the door, and watched the rising of the moon in silence until, like a thing released from restraining bonds, new-dipped in the life-blood of departed day, it shot up into the sky. He was not aware how long he remained thus, he was not aware that his companion had risen also and stood beside him, until he felt the touch of a hand upon his shoulder.

"Grit, it's cold," a voice said, rousing him from his meditations.—"And we haven't any bedclothes."

He turned his head slowly and surveyed her by the increasing light of the moon. Then he pushed her inside and shut the door.

"We'll take a mattress off one of the beds," he said, "and sleep in front of the fire. . . ."

The next day Lawless announced his intention of going into town in quest of a further supply of comforts. Tottie suggested accompanying him, but he negatived the idea.

"I want your mount for a pack-horse," he said.

"That's all very fine," she grumbled. "What am I to do all day by myself? Think of the risk in a place like this. . . . The white woman and the black man, you know."

He laughed grimly.

"You have a revolver. I'd back you against any nigger that happened along."

He rode away in the morning sunshine with the second horse on a lead. For the first mile the woman accompanied him, walking beside him with her hand on his stirrup. Once or twice she looked up at him as he sat, a straight soldierly figure, in the saddle, with the strong stern face shaded by the wide-brimmed hat, and the keen sombre eyes fixed steadily ahead, and in her own eyes shone the light of loyal affection and admiration which so often appeared in them when they rested on him unseen.

"Bring some sort of a newspaper back with you, Grit," she begged. "It'll help to keep up the fiction that we're still in the world, somehow."

Then she parted from him and started to walk back alone, and he put the horses at a canter and rode forward into the blue haze that shrouded and softened the scene. The morning air was delicately fresh and crisp with a touch of sharpness in it like the feel of an English spring.

The African winter, with its warm sunshiny days and cold nights, is the most perfect season in a land that boasts one of the finest climates in the world. White man's weather, it is called ; and it sets the white man thinking pleasantly of the land he speaks of and thinks of as Home. It set Lawless thinking of Home as he rode across the veld,—of a gabled grey-walled house set down in a pretty garden that gave upon a lane. The lane in summer was gay with wild flowers and shaded by find old elms, and he had walked there often with the beautiful woman who had lived in the grey stone house, the woman who had professed to love him, and who had written to him later that she never wished to see him again.

As he thought of it now a wave of bitterness surged over him. He recalled a sentence in her letter that had stung him at the time—that stung him still with a no less poignant pain : “ *I do not know you. . . . I think I have never known you. You are a stranger to me, and, I see now, my greatest enemy.* ” . . . There were other things in the letter that had hurt ; but that sentence stood out luridly with no whit of the bitterness gone from it after all the years. . . .

And so he rode, haunted by memories, his consciousness lashed with the knowledge that what she had written was true. And he knew that the pain of it all was still fresh in her memory as in his. He had read that in her face, and in the tones of her voice, when, at what cost to her pride he dimly understood, she had met and spoken with him again. And he was consciously, deliberately, adding to her distress. At the time it had been a matter of indifference to him what she thought of the life he was leading ; now, with his thoughts of her softened by distance, he regretted that he had not deceived her as to the manner of his leaving

Cape Town. It had been a poor sort of revenge to flout his mistress in her face—and unnecessary. A man usually conceals such ugly facts. But it could avail little to harbour regrets at this stage. The thing was at an end for ever. He was out of her life now. If she allowed her thoughts to dwell upon him at all, it would only be, he felt, as upon one who was dead to her, and who had caused her no less pain in his dying than he had caused her in his life.

Lawless was late in getting back to the shanty. The light had fallen and night was settling upon the land. While he was still a good way off he discerned the house by the flickering yellow glimmer of the candles Tottie had put in the window as a landmark for him. It was the only means of illumination she had at hand. There was an oil lamp in the house, but the paraffin, which Lawless was bringing with him, had been forgotten on the day of their arrival.

He gave a short sharp whistle as he rode up, and she opened the door and came forth to meet him.

"Lend a hand at unloading," he said, swinging himself out of the saddle. "The pack's heavy. Come round this side."

She helped him lift the sacks from the back of the led horse, and accompanied him to the stable to settle the animals for the night, carrying a dripping tallow candle in her hand, by the feeble light of which they accomplished their task.

Lawless was very silent, almost taciturn, while he off-saddled and rubbed down his weary horse, giving to Tottie's gossiping inquiries curt monosyllabic replies.

"Tired, Grit?" she asked, noting his preoccupation. He swore.

"It's something more than tired," he said.

They left the stables, and walking back to where

they had deposited the sacks, lifted them, and carried them indoors.

"Got my paper?" she inquired.

He took the newspaper from his pocket and flung it on the table with an oath. The woman looked at him searchingly. It occurred to her that he had been drinking. If it were not that, something had happened to put him out.

Lawless suddenly approached the table and struck the paper, lying where he had flung it, with his open hand.

"They've bungled this business again," he said savagely,—“that pompous fool, Grey, and his crony, Simmonds. . . . Simmonds has gone to his account, poor devil! And Van Bleit's in tronk, awaiting his trial for murder.”

Tottie's mouth fell open.

"And the letters?" she gasped.

Having fired his bomb, Lawless cooled down. He took out his pipe, filled, and lighted it, and dropped wearily into a chair.

"You'll read it all in the paper," he said. "There's no mention of the letters." He gave a short laugh. "My little plan, which I've rehearsed to you, in which you were to help, is knocked on the head. I might just as well never have come here. It's that crass, pig-headed, officious old muddler's doing. He never trusted me. . . . He fancies I've done a bunk. . . . That's because you're in it." He laughed again. "It hasn't occurred to them that you might be useful—I'm supposed to be simply enjoying myself."

He smoked for a few minutes at a furious rate, while Tottie opened and read the paper with her elbows on the table and her chin in her hands.

"It's a case of the biter bit," observed Lawless.

"Looks as though they had intended murdering him. . . . A silly sort of a game."

"Do you think Van Bleit will hang for it?" she asked presently.

"It's impossible to say. If it pans out at a term of imprisonment it's checkmate. I've a mind to wash my hands of the job."

Tottie looked up.

"Don't do that," she said earnestly. "The Colonel might take it that his suspicions were justified, if you did."

"I don't care a damn what he thinks. If a man can't trust me, he can do the other thing."

"But I care," she said quickly. "I'm jealous for your honour, Grit."

He lifted his head and surveyed her in surprise.

"You!" he said.

Then he laughed awkwardly at the half-shamed admiration he surprised in the woman's eyes. She turned her face aside quickly, and resumed her reading of the paper.

"All right!" he said sheepishly.

When she had finished the case, she got up and stood opposite him on the other side of the hearth.

"What is your next move?" she asked.

"I don't move," he answered quietly, "until after the case is finished."

"And in the meantime?" . . .

"In the meantime," he replied, smiling across at her, "you stay here with me in this God-forsaken hole."

XV

VAN BLEIT'S trial occupied considerably less time than was anticipated. It came on early in the session, and was quickly disposed of. The evidence was contradictory and unsatisfactory. Van Bleit, who was put in the witness box by his counsel, gave the only clear and unreserved account of the night's doings. His plea was that he killed Simmonds in self-defence. There had been ill-feeling between himself and Simmonds for some time. On the night in question he had gone to the bungalow in perfect good faith. There was nothing remarkable in his being armed. He had carried a revolver ever since he had roughed it in Rhodesia. At the bungalow he had met with a hostile reception. Simmonds had locked the door of the room and put the key in his pocket. He had then drawn a revolver from his coat pocket and had covered Van Bleit with it.

"I recognised that I must defend my life," Van Bleit finished with fine dramatic effect. "A man hasn't time to consider on such occasions ; he acts on impulse. But I solemnly declare I had no intention to kill the man. I fired wildly, and I am certain no one could have been more distressed than myself when I discovered that my shot had proved fatal. I was scarcely conscious that I had fired until Simmonds fell."

Colonel Grey corroborated his statement as to the locking of the door ; but he added that there was nothing hostile in the act. He believed it had been done to

guard against interruption. He further allowed that Simmonds had been somewhat hasty. He had been the first to produce a revolver. He had not, however, covered the prisoner with it. The prisoner had been excited and had fired without provocation.

The jury retired for about ten minutes. When they returned they pronounced the prisoner Not Guilty. The verdict was received with cheers. When a man has stood on trial for his life the tension of feeling is sufficiently strained to cause a strong reaction on his acquittal in favour of the accused.

Van Bleit left the court with his friends, and Smythe, who was as much astonished as relieved at the turn affairs had taken, drove him home to his wife as the surest proof he could offer her that her cousin was a free man.

"I don't know how he does it," he confided in Van Bleit's counsel, who was a personal friend, and whose fee he was responsible for. "I take it, he's reserved for something worse than hanging."

The strain had told on Van Bleit. He had recognised that he stood in a particularly tight place. Death had been his constant companion sleeping and waking for so long that his nerve was shattered for the time. Excitement had kept him up hitherto, now that the necessity to brace himself was ended he collapsed like a deflated paper bag.

When he got alone with his cousin he gave way and blubbered feebly as a child blubbers who has been beaten and desires to but cannot retaliate. Mrs. Smythe was shocked. She pressed whisky on him with a heart overflowing with pity, and he helped himself liberally from the decanter until his lachrymose condition gave place to a bombastic assurance that was almost as pitiful to witness. Mrs. Smythe sent her hus-

band off to his club, unmindful that he should encounter Karl in his present mood, and she and her cousin dined alone.

"We'll have a nice quiet time together," she said gently. "You'll sleep here to-night, Karl?"

"I might as well—yes," he replied.

He got up, wandered aimlessly round the room, and then came back, put his arms round her shoulders and kissed her.

"You haven't told me anything about Her yet," he said. "Has she been upset? . . . anxious? . . . I've thought about her day and night."

Mrs. Smythe looked troubled.

"You mean—Zoë?"

He stared at her in surprise.

"Why, who else?" he asked.

"She has been with me a lot," she answered evasively.

"She's very kind, Karl—so sympathetic."

"Of course she didn't believe me guilty?" he questioned, his bold dark eyes holding hers, confident in the remembrance of his last interview with Mrs. Lawless that she could not have thought unkindly of him in the interval.

"I don't know. . . . She never spoke of you," Mrs. Smythe returned unwillingly. "Zoë is very reserved."

He smiled with some complacence.

"She won't be reserved with me," he said, "when I see her to-morrow. I'm living for to-morrow. I would have gone to her this evening only——"

He hesitated to complete the sentence, but Mrs. Smythe understood.

"I think it just as well not to be too precipitate," she said.

Something in her manner arrested him. He glanced at her sharply.

"You don't know . . . you haven't heard anything?" he stammered.

She had neither the heart nor the courage to shatter his hopes. She smiled at him and shook her head.

"Women don't bare their hearts to one another," she answered. "But I always feel with Zoë Lawless that she lives in the past."

"Pshaw!" he returned easily. "You're a sentimentalist, Kate."

The following day when Van Bleit called upon Mrs. Lawless he had occasion to remember his cousin's words, and to wonder whether she might not have some grounds for her opinion. The message he received at the door was that Mrs. Lawless was out. He left the magnificent basket of flowers he had brought with him, and scribbled hastily on a visiting card that he would call again on the morrow, and went away dissatisfied. She must have known that he would call that day. If she had felt kindly towards him she would have remained at home to receive him. He was undecided whether to infer from her action that she no longer had any wish to meet him, or if she was merely piqued that he had not gone straightway to her after his liberation, and desired to show by her coldness her displeasure at his negligence. The latter view appealing more to his self-esteem he inclined towards adopting it; though a knowledge of Zoë Lawless' character should have dispelled any such supposition.

The next day when he reached the house and rang the bell, with considerably less confidence than on the former occasion, he was met with the same disconcerting message as before. Mrs. Lawless was not at home. There could be no mistake this time as to the intention of the rebuff.

He ground his heel savagely into the gravel of the

path and turned away. It was the trial and the charge of murder, he decided, which had probably shocked her. It was not sufficient apparently that he had been acquitted of the charge; womanlike, she held him responsible for the life he had taken.

He went back to his own rooms. He had left the Smythes. The animosity that existed between himself and Smythe rendered it inadvisable for them to remain long beneath the same roof. And he had no inclination for his cousin's society. He shrank from the thought of her sympathy. It was humiliating beyond measure to have to acknowledge his defeat to her.

Then, like an inspiration, the advice Lawless had given him on the last occasion when they had lunched together flashed into his mind. He decided to adopt it, to leave Cape Town immediately. It did not seem to occur to him that had absence been likely to further his cause his recent detention should have considerably advanced him in favour.

At this crisis a telegraphic message arrived from Lawless himself.

"congrats try change of air bed board and welcome here grit."

Van Bleit read this message many times, and considered it for fully half an hour before he wrote a reply. He considered his reply with equal care, and made several alterations in the form before finally writing it out on a fresh form and dispatching it.

"good travelling with denzil might as well come your way karl."

He put on his hat and went out. It remained for him to look up Denzil and inform him of the holiday he had planned. He had taken all the risks he intended taking. He had had experience of two men against

one ; on this occasion he determined the strength of numbers should be on his side.

Denzil was astonished, and not altogether delighted, when he heard Van Bleit's proposal. He had no particular fancy for wintering on the high veld, and he did not desire to leave Cape Town.

"What makes you suspect treachery in Grit Lawless?" he asked. "I thought he was a particular chum of yours."

"I thought so myself until I found out he was in Colonel Grey's pay."

"And how did you discover that?" the other inquired sceptically. "Told you, I suppose?"

"Not much," Van Bleit answered craftily. "But I keep a watch on the Colonel's doings, and I know fairly accurately all the visitors he receives at the bungalow. It was the greatest surprise in the world to me when I tracked Grit Lawless there. I watched him unseen go in and out on three separate occasions. He has passed me so close that by stretching out a hand he could have touched me, and bade me good-night in response to my 'Good-night, baas,' taking me for the Kaffir I disguised myself to represent. He is very wide awake is Grit Lawless, but I'm wider awake still. I've followed him up to the stoep of the bungalow and heard him greet the old man, unconscious of a listener. He can't kid me. The only thing that puzzles me is his absconding with that she-devil. It's just possible that he has had a split with the Colonel. But that doesn't make him any friend of ours, you understand. Grit is cunning enough to play the game off his own bat. I'm not for trusting any man. We'll go, but we'll need to be wide awake."

Denzil looked at the speaker admiringly. He was cunning himself ; it was due to his fertile brain that the

letters had fallen into Van Bleit's hands, otherwise he would never have participated in the profits ; but his cunning was not equal to the Dutchman's, nor his courage. He was a nervous little fellow, and would gladly have parted with the letters for the handsome sum offered by the other side. He was always keenly alive to the danger of his profession as blackmailer. It was only his fear of Van Bleit that kept him in subjection. And he was sorely afraid that Van Bleit would overreach himself and land them both some day into difficulties with the law.

"Why go," he asked sensibly, "if you don't trust the man?"

Van Bleit shrugged his huge shoulders.

"It suits me to go somewhere," he answered. "And I'd like to test the fellow."

"You're more than a match for him," Denzil remarked tentatively.

Van Bleit smiled drily.

"I daresay, Dick," he said. "But I've a fancy for your company. . . . I shouldn't like the Colonel to get worrying you just now."

"You mean," Denzil said stiffly, "that you distrust me?"

"Not you, my dear fellow, but your judgment," Van Bleit replied easily. "If it hadn't been for me you would have parted with a fortune for a beggarly sum long since."

"I'd be content," observed Denzil in an injured tone, "with a handsome sum down. Where's the sense in squeezing a man past his endurance?"

"We've got to find out how far his endurance goes," the other answered. "Your conscience is over sensitive, my boy, for a job of this kind. We've a handsome annuity in those letters. . . . Why on earth should we sink

it in a sum we should both squander in a year ? There's no reason in it, and no commercial instinct. Apart from that, I've gone through an experience that entitles me to redress. Do you suppose I've endured nothing in standing on my trial ? I wasn't responsible for Simmonds' death ; it was his own silly fault. But I might have had to pay for it. The other side has got to make that good to me, and it isn't to be done cheaply. Putting a man's private feelings on one side, think of the expense of counsel's fees, and such things ! ”

Van Bleit was careful not to mention that all the expenses of his trial had been borne by Theodore Smythe, who laboured under the delusion that his wife's cousin had very little ready money at his command. It was a mystery to him how Van Bleit lived. Had he suspected him of blackmailing, he would not have lifted a finger to save his neck from the rope.

Denzil nodded shortly.

“ Yes, of course. . . . I quite see your point,” he said. “ At the same time, I wish you could come to some sort of agreement. I think after this Grey might meet you quite handsomely. And it would be satisfactory to me, at least, to be finished with the business. Men have got twenty years for blackmail before now.”

Van Bleit drew himself up and eyed his subordinate aggressively.

“ If you're funking it,” he said, “ say so, and be done with it. I'm not going to work with a man I can't be sure of. We have worked together so far satisfactorily that it will be regrettable if you separate our interests now. But it has to be now or never. I'm not throwing this up for any scruple. Do you, or do you not, stand in with me ? ”

Denzil's nature was weak, prone to any influence ;

and the dominating personality of the other man bore him down easily.

"Of course I stand in with you," he said. "Our interests are identical."

"Good!" Van Bleit rejoined. "You're a wobbler, Dick; but you generally rise to the occasion. Then you go with me to-morrow? You won't find it very amusing, though it may have its exciting moments. . . . Unless, of course, the lady is still keeping house for Grit. But from the invite I imagine she has left him in the lurch."

"He'd scarcely ask you up there if he'd got any women about," was the reply, which Van Bleit construed into a compliment. He smiled complacently.

"I wouldn't mind hunting down the quarry on my own account," he said. "She was devilishly handsome—and a dashed bad lot."

XVI

THE result of the trial was as great a surprise for Lawless as it had been for Theodore Smythe. Lawless had ridden into Stellenbosch daily for the paper, and had scanned the columns eagerly for any mention of the case. On the day that he read of Van Bleit's acquittal he sent off the telegram, the receipt of which had decided Van Bleit on a change of air.

He had ridden into town alone; Tottie, who usually accompanied him, had remained at home to attend, as she informed him, to the ravages her wardrobe had sustained through the hard wear of the veld. When Lawless got back he flung the paper in through the open doorway and rode on to the stable, where he off-saddled, and then returned to the house. Tottie, when he entered, was seated at the table in her favourite attitude, with her elbows upon it and her chin in her hands, devouring the paper with avidity. She looked up as his tall figure blocked the doorway and laughed.

"He's got the devil's own luck," she said. "But this is all right for you, old man."

Lawless walked up to the table.

"I've sent off a wire asking him here," he said.

She laughed again.

"You don't lose time. . . . And what's to become of me? Plainly, you wouldn't expose me to such a risk as that."

"I shall banish you to the hut we looked at on our arrival. It's quarter of a mile away, and the bush just

behind it. You'll sleep there and spend your days in the bush."

"What a lively programme!" she ejaculated.

"Fairly dull—yes." He went nearer to her and laid a hand on her shoulder. "I'm not going to pretend that you'll get much joy of it," he said. "But you wanted to help me."

She looked up and nodded.

"Yes, I wanted to help. . . . If I had to spend my nights as well as my days in the bush, I'd do it."

His hand gripped her shoulder till it hurt.

"You're the right stuff," he said,—“the best stuff. You and I together will pull this off.”

That night was destined to be a night of surprises. Hardly had they supped, while they yet lingered at the table discussing their plans, a sound broke suddenly upon the silence, a sound so unusual that Lawless stopped abruptly in the middle of his talk, and Tottie's head went up with a jerk like the head of a wild thing scenting danger. And so they remained for a while listening in attitudes of strained attention. The sounds were unmistakably made by the heavy creaking wheels of a waggon travelling towards them across the veld. Tottie looked at her companion inquiringly.

"It's a surprise party, baas," she said. "They've seen our light and are for outspanning."

For answer Lawless pushed back his chair, and, rising, started to clear away the evidence of the *tête-à-tête* meal. She helped him swiftly and in silence, pausing every now and again to listen to the sounds that were gradually getting nearer, growing momentarily louder and more distinctive. The cracking of a whip was heard, and above it the noise of men's voices raised in a rollicking song.

"Get into the bedroom," Lawless commanded.

"You must make your escape by the window, and sleep in the hut."

"But—strangers!" she protested. "Why shouldn't I participate in the fun? . . ."

"We can't run the risk," he said.—"No! You make yourself scarce, and leave this to me. Strangers or no, they're rowdy. . . . I would rather have no woman in this."

She demurred still, foreseeing a merry evening, and not relishing the part allotted to her; but he carried his point; and reluctantly she went into the bedroom and fastened the door upon herself. He waited until she was secure from observation, then he opened the outer door and stood in the lighted aperture, looking into the night.

"Hallo!" shouted a voice in English out of the darkness.

"Hallo!" he answered back.

A young man came forward, swinging a lantern in his hand.

"We're outspanning here," he said. "I never expected such luck as that this place was occupied. A fire is all we need. We carry provisions with us."

"Come in and welcome," Lawless answered. "How many of you are there? Whatever accommodation I have is at your service."

"We are five," the other answered. "They're unharnessing the mules. We lost our driver at the last uitspan." He lifted his lantern and looked about him. "This is a slice of luck. For two nights we've been jolly near frozen, sleeping in the wain."

"I'm glad," Lawless said, "that you happened this way. I was just about fed up with my own society. Let's lend a hand with unharnessing the mules. It's a Godsend a visitation like this."

The young man looked at him curiously.

"If you're so out of conceit with it all, why do you stay?" he asked.

"Because," Lawless answered, and smiled strangely, "I was under the delusion I'd have companionship when I took the place. My tenancy expires shortly, and I shan't renew it."

The new-comer understood. He looked away from his companion and spat noisily on the ground.

"I'm glad we chanced by while you were still in possession," he said.

They walked together by the fitful light of the lantern to where the rest of the party were busy with the mules. They lent a hand, and when the team was outspanned and haltered to the dessel-boom inside a hastily improvised laager, they repaired to the house, carrying provisions with them. Amongst the provisions was a limited quantity of whisky and any amount of Cape dop. Most of the party were already drunk. It was evident from the outset that they meant to make a night of it.

"I expect," Lawless said, as he preceded his visitors into the living-room, "that you'll be glad of a hot supper. My culinary powers are not great, such as they are I'll be happy to cook for you."

"Don't you bother, baas," the young man who had first introduced himself exclaimed. "I'll cook for them. You supply the fire and the roof, that's quite enough."

Lawless was immeasurably relieved. Tottie had done all the cooking their simple household had required; he had very little idea of the art himself. But he knew where the cooking utensils were kept, and supplied them; and the young man set about making a stew that smelt very appetising as it heated over the fire. The others sprawled before the hearth and drank while they

waited for the meal. Before it was ready a further interruption occurred that made an addition to the numbers already assembled. It was indeed a night of surprises for the man who acted as host to these unexpected and none too welcome guests.

The new-comer made his appearance on horseback, and rode right up to the window before anyone suspected his approach. The sound of his horse's hoofs was deadened by the noisy chaff round the fire. He looked in through the open window upon the rowdy group, and, leaning from the saddle, gripped the sill with his hand.

"Hallo, there!" he shouted in a cheery voice. "Got room for another? I've lost my bearings on this tractless waste, and seeing your uitspan calculated some sort of hospitality was going forward. I'm going to stable my mount. May I come in? I'm Tom Hayhurst."

Lawless started, and looked round. The name conveyed much to him. It conveyed something to several others present; they looked up with a grin of welcome.

"Good old Tom!" said one man. "I haven't seen him since we were at the poor man's diggings together."

Tom Hayhurst's face beamed in upon them.

"Who's baas here?" he asked.

"I am," Lawless answered quietly, stepping forward to the aperture. "There's room for your mount in the stable. Come in."

"Right!" the young man answered. "I don't know you from the devil. Got a lantern, anyone?"

Someone handed him a lantern through the window, and he rode away, whistling. One of the men laughed.

"Old Tom has been missing lately. Wonder where he's been?" he mused.

"There are plenty of us can't always account for our movements," someone else answered, amid a fresh

guffaw of mirth. "But wherever he's been in the interval, he's always good company. Say, baas, you've got a picnic to-night."

Lawless made no reply. The name of Tom Hayhurst had roused memories, had taken him back to a lonely bungalow in Cape Town, where a man had related to him briefly how Tom Hayhurst had failed him in an important mission. He had been for wringing Tom Hayhurst's neck at the time. He did not feel especially friendly towards him on that particular night; but Hayhurst had happened upon his dwelling out of the darkness, and claimed his hospitality, as was customary in the veld.

He moved back to the ring round the fire, and seated himself on an upturned box and stared thoughtfully into the flame. The arrival of the new-comer was strangely annoying to him.

Hayhurst came in noisily, and shaking hands with the man who had been at the diggings with him, nodded to the rest. They made way for him at the fire. He stood in front of it, looking curiously at Lawless while he warmed his hands at the blaze. The scar on Lawless' face seemed to hold his attention.

"My name's Hayhurst," he remarked somewhat pointedly.

Lawless surveyed him with an air of quiet aloofness, and, without removing the pipe from his mouth, replied :

"So you said before."

Hayhurst was not easily disconcerted, but he reddened slightly and gave an awkward laugh.

"It's damned cold," he said. "I'm chilled to the bone. If anyone presses me, I'll take a glass of dop. . . . Don't overdo it with water."

Stephens, the man from the diggings, handed him a glass. Young Hayhurst drank the contents, and re-

mained a while staring into the empty tumbler with a thoughtful smile on his face. Then he put the tumbler down, and returned to his occupation of warming his hands. He glanced again at Lawless.

"I've heard of you," he said,—“from a chap who won't tell any more tales of anyone, good or bad. . . . That mark on your face gives you away.”

"Don't be personal, Tom," hiccupped his friend.

Lawless got up.

"I've heard of you, too," he returned curtly. "The repetition of the information wouldn't be likely to make you vain, so we won't go into that."

There was a perceptible hang in the conversation. The men broke off in their talk to listen, and the man who was cooking the supper looked up from his task to stare. The sense of something in the air penetrated even to the dulled wit of the most intoxicated of the party, a man of rough appearance and no education, who spent all his spare time in getting drunk, and crowded as much work into his sober hours as three ordinary men would have accomplished. He shook his head gravely, and then with solemn deliberation refilled his ever-empty glass from the bottle of dop at his elbow.

"Don't mix your drinks," he counselled . . . "bad for the constitootion—very."

He maundered on, but nobody heeded him. Hayhurst was looking steadily into the keen eyes of the man whom he recognised from the description he had once listened to of the peculiar scar on his face. He had no shadow of a doubt as to the man's identity.

"Since what I have heard of you," he returned, "might be calculated to make you vain, I'll spare your modesty. As for my own reputation! . . ." He laughed suddenly. "That wouldn't pay for whitewashing, would it, boys?"

He gazed round on the group with the laugh still in his eyes. Rentoul, who had given the advice against mixing one's liquor, looked up owlishly.

"You never done a dirty trick, Tom," he said. . . . "Nothin' mean about you. Gimme your 'and, me boy. No need for whitewashing. . . . What say?—Tom's all ri', ain't 'e?"

Hayhurst flung himself down on the hearth beside him, and stretched his legs, encased in dusty gaiters, towards the fire.

"Tom's a good sort," Rentoul continued, blinking round on the rest. . . . "Always said so—goo' sort!—but fond of his liquor. You're drunk, Tom. . . . Been takin' wets along the road."

Hayhurst laughed again.

"The veld's so overstocked with pubs—ain't it?" he said.

"Here, hand out the plates, someone—will you?—this mess is ready," announced the chef.

There was a general move. The clattering of plates and knives superseded the talk; and for a fairly lengthy interval conversation gave place entirely to the sound of hungry men feeding noisily in rude and primitive fashion.

XVII

WHEN supper was ended the plates were pushed into a bucket of water and left to soak until they should be required again. One of the men got hold of the newspaper, and read it aloud to the rest. The names of Van Bleit and Simmonds were familiar to everyone present. Some of them had been personally acquainted with the owners of the names, and all were interested more or less in the case.

"It's the best man that has reached his terminus," Stephens remarked. "I could spin a yarn or two about Van Bleit."

"Who couldn't?" laughed another man. "But he always comes up smiling, somehow. I should say this let off was the biggest surprise he ever had."

"'E served me an ugly trick once," muttered Rentoul darkly, endeavouring to obtain a further supply of dop from the empty bottle beside him. . . . "Over a woman that was. . . . When I was down with dysentry too."

He sat up with a poor attempt to look sober, and leaning forward tried to push the floor away, which, in the most annoying manner, threatened to hit him in the face. To avoid collision with it, he stood upon his feet, and turning round two or three times to get his balance, raised his arms and solemnly addressed the grinning group of listeners.

"Dysentry's a crool complaint, gets a grip on a man. Reg'lar epidemic it was in camp that year. Doctor done 'is best to stamp it out, but whot could 'e

do in that beastly 'ole? I done whot I could to 'elp 'im. 'Boys, the doctor's right,' I says. 'You're a dirty lot o' swine. Look at your camps. D'you expect the doctor to go round an' stick 'is nose into your stinking places? Why don't you clean up? . . . Personal cleanliness. . . . I know. . . . I've seen it afore.' " He pointed at the grinning faces about him, and became personal and aggressive. "You wouldn't wash your dirty mugs if you could 'elp it, any of you."

"That'll do, Mat," someone interrupted.

"Neither would I," resumed the orator in a more conciliatory tone, "unless I 'ad to. But we've got to be clean. . . . We've got to 'elp the doctor. . . . We've got to fight this thing. Coming events cast their shadders before. It'll be here amongst us next. And it ain't no use waitin' for the Government. What's the use of the Government when you're out prospecting with six boys, an' the lions come on you an' kill three of them? Whot d'you do? S'pose you got a gun loaded in two barrels. . . . Do you run back to call the p'lice? . . . Do you go for the magistrate to come an' 'elp yer? Where'd you an' your boys be? . . . No! You put your barrel into their guts and pull the trigger—yes, every time. An' we got to do the same with the dysentry. 'E don't come on you with a bound; 'e crawls through the grass, like a snake. 'E comes on gradually and slow . . . takes you unawares. We've got to stamp 'im out. We've got to pull the trigger, and not wait for the Government. . . ."

"Sit down, Mat, and give somebody else a chance," Stephens interrupted, with a wink at the rest.

"You can 'ave your say," retorted Mat, "when I've finished." He turned round and round, emphasising his remarks with repeated blows of one hard soiled fist

upon the grimy palm of the other hand. "We've got to stamp it out," he shouted. "We've got to fight it. I remember when I was young——"

"For God's sake, dry up!" interposed another. "You've missed your vocation."

"Who're you gettin' at with yer 'vocation'?" Rentoul demanded with bitter superiority. "I don't know anything about vocation. I picked up my eddication off jam tins and pickle bottles. I've no time for vocation. If you'd been in Jo'burg when I was there, you'd 'ave 'ad no time for eddication either. You'd 'ave been in tronk, where they makes yer wash yer face every morning—behind the ears too. To hell with yer! I've said all I want ter say. . . . We've got to stamp it out."

He fell to muttering, and eyeing the last interrupter malevolently, sat down again.

"We've got to stamp it out," he said. "Gimme the bottle, Tom. You've swilled too much of that dysentery mixture, me boy. You're drunk—tha's what you are."

"Van Bleit was running some quarry in Cape Town," an older man observed, continuing the conversation from where it had been broken off. He sucked thoughtfully at his pipe and stared into the fire. . . . "Woman with lots of money, I heard—and looks too. Must be hard up for an honest man if she takes on Karl."

"This case will have about finished that game, I should fancy," the chef of the party remarked.

Lawless got up, and flung a fresh log on the fire. He kicked it into position with his boot, and pressed it down among the glowing embers, pressing heavily as though it were some enemy he trod beneath his foot. Then he turned slowly round.

"Time's been standing still for some of you," he said.

"I've been in Cape Town recently. There's nothing in that report."

Rentoul looked up from his corner.

"Whot you talking about?" he asked. "Time always stands still. . . . We move—Time don't move. If you come back in a thousand years, Time will still be 'ere, I tell you. . . . I read it in them magazines."

"Did you see Van Bleit when you were there?" someone asked, ignoring the dissertation on Time.

"I did. I lunched with him the day I left. He is by way of being a—chum of mine."

Rentoul made a clumsy effort to get upon his feet.

"Then I'm goin' to 'it you," he said. "I can't get at 'im, but I'll bash your mug in, see if I don't."

"Oh! sit down, and don't be a silly ass," Lawless returned irritably.

Tom Hayhurst pulled the quarrelsome member back into his place.

"Go easy, Mat; he's baas here," he said.

Rentoul scowled darkly.

"I don't own any man baas," he muttered thickly.

"I don't care a damn for any man breathing. . . . All men are equal. I don't care for you, nor anyone. In a few years we'll all be the same. When some digger comes along and digs up my skull and Cecil Rhodes' skull, who'll tell which was Mat Rentoul's, and which Rhodes'?"

Somebody laughed.

"They'll only need to look at the size of the cavity in the craniums, Mat," he said.

"There you go again!" Rentoul rejoined acrimoniously. "Fancies yerself a British encyclopedia don't yer?"

The oldest of the party, who was slightly grizzled, and had the appearance of one who might have done

something in the world and had somehow missed his opportunities, looked hard at Lawless.

"Weren't you in the C.M. at one time?" he asked. "The name conveys nothing, but I seem to remember your face."

Lawless nodded.

"That's right," he said. "I knew you the minute I saw you. But as I stood for law and order in those days and you didn't, I did not insist on the acquaintance. It was only the accident of the different sources from which we drew our pay that put me in the right and you seemingly in the wrong. The Police were too damned interfering with the privileges of humanity for my taste. That's why I chucked it."

"Good!" The grizzled man smiled in appreciation of the speaker's sentiments, and tossed his nearly empty tobacco-pouch across to him. "Fill up," he said. "That's good stuff."

Lawless caught the pouch, filled his pipe, and tossed it back again to the owner.

"It was while I was in the Police I got chummy with Van Bleit," he volunteered.

Tom Hayhurst rose unexpectedly and swaggered through the group sprawling before the hearth, until he stood close to Lawless, with his back towards the fire.

"I wouldn't mind making a wager there isn't a man here who hasn't heard of 'Grit,'" he said.

His face was flushed, his mien slightly defiant, as though he challenged, not only the men he addressed, but the stern, keen-eyed man who surveyed him disapprovingly with his strangely penetrating, inscrutable grey eyes.

"'Grit'!" The grizzled man looked up with a laugh. "Of course. That was the name you went

by in the days when you weren't Lawless either in name or occupation. To think I should forget ! ”

“ You're too damned modest,” yelled a youngster. “ The chaps tell stories about you up in Rhodesia to-day.”

“ Fairy-tales,” Lawless responded, smoking indifferently.

“ That's a lie, anyway,” retorted Hayhurst. “ I know one or two facts.”

“ Among facts I know about you,” Lawless replied sharply, “ is that you gab too freely. Sit down, and shut up.”

Hayhurst looked nettled. He lost his ready assurance and lapsed into a sulky mood.

“ I'll knock any man's head off who says that about me,” he muttered.

“ Well, come and knock mine off,” was the curt invitation ; and during the derisive laughter that followed Hayhurst sat down.

“ Shake ! ”

Mat Rentoul had emerged from his corner, and, swaying at Lawless' elbow, unsteadily advanced his huge fist.

“ Shake ! ” he repeated peremptorily. And on the command being complied with, he turned about and harangued the rest. “ Said I'd 'it 'im, didn't I ? Well, 'e can 'it me, if 'e likes. I'll 'it any man whot isn't a friend of 'is. That woman I spoke of——”

“ Oh ! dry up,” shouted Lawless, beginning to lose his temper.

“ 'It me, if you like,” returned Mat imperturbably. . . . “ I've said you might. . . . Gave 'er 'is last thick 'un, 'e did, and 'elped 'er back to 'er friends. She told me 'erself. . . . You did—you lie !—an' took in yer belt two 'oles when you fancied she wasn't

looking. I don't care what hell's scum you chum with . . . they won't do you any 'arm."

"Oh! let him alone, Grit," the man whose pouch he had shared, and who was called Graves, interposed carelessly. "Nobody's listening. Send round the bottle, boys. There's been too much leakage in one quarter. Play fair."

Somebody produced a tin whistle, and after a very creditable performance on it, took a draught from a glass another man offered him, wiped his lips with the back of his hand, and started a familiar music-hall ditty.

"You take solo, Tom," Stephens suggested.

Hayhurst, who was lying sulking, with his elbow on the floor and his hand supporting his head, kicked out a dusty riding-boot aggressively, but made no other move.

"I'm holding my jaw," he said.

"Don't be a jackass. If you won't take the solo, I will."

The other rolled over and sat up.

"There's one thing I object to more strongly than singing myself on the present occasion," he remarked, "and that's listening to you. Give me the note, Bill, and then go ahead."

The men sat round, smoking and listening, while Bill played his little tin whistle, and the youngster sang in a throaty tenor some jingling absurdity about a girl and a balloon. Each in his way was an artist, and made music out of the poor material. Mat Rentoul grew noisily hilarious, and then tearful; but he joined in the chorus with the rest. Lusty and strong rang out the voices from half a dozen stalwart throats, all of which needed lubricating when the song was finished before they started afresh. Through the open window

the sound floated out into the night. The stars that hung low in the purple heavens blinked as it were with astonishment at this rude breaking of the surrounding peace, and someone, crouching in the darkness against the mud wall of the hut, with the dirty blanket wrapped around her to protect her from the cold, opened wide eyes and listened intently to the unfamiliar noise.

One by one the voices trailed off, till only the tenor was left singing to the thin accompaniment of the tireless tin whistle. Then that too ceased, and the night was silent again, given over to the watchful stars and the stirless air, as they waited for the dawn.

Lawless looked round on his sleeping guests, and stirred the fire noisily with his boot until it leapt into flame. Slumber had overtaken these men where they sprawled before the hearth. Some rested easily with their heads pillowed on their arms ; one—it was Rentoul—lay like a log on his back, his great mouth open, breathing stertorously, and his twitching limbs flung wide.

“Hogs !” he muttered.

He fetched a pillow from one of the bedrooms, and lifting Rentoul’s inert head slipped it underneath. As he straightened himself after the performance of this office he became aware of a pair of eyes that followed his movements with interest, and perceived that among those silent figures one at least was wakeful and alert.

Hayhurst sat up, and then got upon his feet.

“Not all hogs this journey,” he said. And added : “The bed where that pillow came from will serve me better than the floor.”

Lawless nodded.

“There’s a bed apiece,” he answered. “The floor to-night is good enough for these.”

He flung on fresh logs, and stepping between the

closely packed forms, took up the lamp from the table and led the way to the bedrooms. Before separating for the night Hayhurst held out his hand.

"To show there's no ill-feeling," he explained with a self-conscious laugh.

Notwithstanding the late carousal of the previous night, the morning found the men early astir. Rentoul awoke only half sober, and had to sharpen his faculties with a nip before he rose, and, despite his overnight homily on personal cleanliness, wiped the dust from his hair and beard with a grimy hand and sat down to breakfast unwashed. In the clear light of day they were a rough, strangely assorted lot; only the older man, Graves, with his air of distinction and education, stood out from the rest, like a man-of-war among a flotilla of "tramps"—but a man-of-war that has been in battle and come out of it badly damaged.

"Rum go, our meeting again, like this," he said to Lawless, while they stood in the sunshine together and watched the others inspanning the mules. "I'd ask you to make a return call, only"—he lifted his shoulders and smiled—"I'm a descendant of Cain—a wanderer upon the earth. I'll own my six feet some day, I suppose, and come to anchor."

Lawless glanced at the speaker with interest.

"I'm something of a rolling stone myself," he answered. "I doubt I shall ever lay claim to greater acreage than you."

"Ah!" Graves stroked the back of his head reflectively, and stared vaguely away into space. "Failures!" he muttered. . . . "Eh? . . . And to think of some of the fellows who're on top! . . ."

"It's another form of selfishness, theirs," Lawless replied. "They've gone for the one thing, and stuck to it. A single idea would never satisfy either you or me.

One man takes Wealth for his mistress ; another, being polygamous, goes for a bevy of mistresses that we may bring under a common heading—Pleasure. The fool pursues Ambition, and the sentimentalist his Ideal. . . . And when it comes to the finish—as Rentoul says—who shall say which man's skull it is he turns up ? ”

Graves nodded assent.

“ And yet,” he said—“ a man's talents. . . . It seems rotten things should pan out like that. I was never a white-haired boy exactly, but I had ideas once of doing something. . . . Rot, of course—damned rot ! And queer, too, how ideas run to seed before they fruit. I tell you a man needs to be ever on the alert, watching his ideas to prevent the growth exceeding the vitality. We don't prune and tend enough. We're so proud of our ideas that we let 'em run up rank and weedy, till they seed before time. It's the man with the strength of mind to nip the young shoots and exert patience who sees the fruition of his ideas.”

“ I confess I don't understand,” said Lawless, “ how you came to allow all yours to seed. With men like those,” and he waved his hand in the direction of the swearing, noisy group hitching the mules to the dessel-boom with many loud and unnecessary oaths, “ it's easy of comprehension. But——”

Graves filled in the pause with a laugh.

“ Ah well ! ” he returned. . . . “ Who can say ? The secret to the riddle lies in what you spoke of just now. . . . I'm a polygamist.”

XVIII

LAWLESS stood in the sunshine and watched the departure of this strange aggregate of human limitation setting forth on its journey into the infinitudes. The clumsy waggon, drawn by its team of four mules, with the dirty faded hood of yellowish green shading the wain, bumped and rumbled over the uneven ground. The jingling of the harness, the creaking of the heavy wheels, and the loud and too frequent cracking of the long whip, struck separate and not inharmonious notes of sound in the stillness of the morning air. And above these sounds a strong voice rang out heartily:

“Good-bye, Grit.”

The men in the waggon started to sing, “*For he’s a jolly good fellow.*” The rude music of their voices came back strongly to Lawless’ ears, and then grew fainter, and yet more faint, until only the silence reigned about him, and the waggon showed smaller and smaller as it trailed slowly across the veld, farther and farther into the illimitable blue distance. Hayhurst had ridden off some time before, taking an opposite direction to that followed by the waggon. The occupant of the shanty was left alone. The world seemed to have emptied suddenly and to have overlooked himself in its indiscriminate sweeping away of all life.

He gazed about him at the solitudes—waste land on all sides, stretching away league upon league in one great sameness,—vast, unchanging open spaces of veld,

green and brown and orange, in which the yellow stones shone warmly in the sunshine, and the dew that lay heavily on the ground like a veil of silver flashed a prismatic defiance with the fire of myriads of gems.

He turned about and went into the house. The advent of these men had been unwelcome, their departure left a blank feeling of desolation behind. He had had as much of the solitudes as was good for him, he decided ; if Van Bleit arrived, he would settle matters with him speedily and return to the beaten track. He felt depressed, and knew not that it was the influence of Graves' personality working upon his mind. This man who had stirred up thoughts of failure by his talk, who in his person stood for waste—the result of neither competition nor intellectual incapacity, but of his own ineffectuality—had set him thinking of the purposelessness of his life, its want of aim, of every high and right intention that once had actuated him, and which he had flung aside and trampled on in weak resentment against the tide of circumstances he had himself set loose and made no attempt to stem. He also stood for waste—the waste of powers which had left him stunted mentally and morally enervated. It is waste that is responsible for the world's great failures.

He made an effort to shake off the mood that held him, and moving across the littered room surveyed the disordered breakfast-table with disgust. Empty bottles stood upon the table, and lay under it where they had been rolled the night before when they had yielded the last drop of their contents. They had been thirsty souls, these men who had happened out of the darkness and vanished again with the light,—failures, in a certain sense, each one of them,—a queer conglomerate of mis-directed energy.

Lawless had a feeling that he ought to reduce the

muddle to order, but he had only a vague idea how to set about it. He caught up the empty bottles, and going outside with them flung them out upon the veld.

"It's no use, Grit, playing Aunt Sally with those bottles. You can't hide your debauch from me."

He turned his face with a laugh and a look of quick relief in the direction of the voice, and there stood Tottie in her short tweed skirt, with a golden lock straggling rakishly over one eye, and her lips unusually pallid.

"You! Gods! I'm glad," he cried.

"Don't stare at me like that," she exclaimed,—
"look somewhere else, can't you? I won't have the eye of man upon me until I have attended to my toilet. There wasn't the vestige of a glass in the hut, you lunatic."

He followed her into the house.

"What an orgy!" she exclaimed, with a swift glance round the untidy room. Her wandering gaze came back to his face and rested upon it curiously.

"Reaction!" she murmured.

"Eh?" he said.

She put a hand on his shoulder and pushed him towards the door.

"You're looking cheap. Clear out of this. I'll put things right. Come back in half an hour, and you'll find breakfast ready."

"I've breakfasted," he answered indifferently.

"Have you? Then you can return in half an hour and repeat the performance with me."

"I want to ride into town," he said.

"Yes, of course. I'll go with you. You might put in your time now grooming the horses. It'll keep you out of mischief, anyhow. . . . It may be the last ride we'll take together for many a day."

He looked swiftly at her. She was trying to hide her feelings, but it was evident that the near termination of this life in the wilds which he had been contemplating with satisfaction, affected her differently. She had enjoyed the uneventful weeks with only his society to companion the long days. It had been a fresh experience which a really strong affection for him had made altogether agreeable. She turned her back on him, and putting up a hand jerked back the straying lock of hair impatiently.

"Get out, Grit. You're in the way," she said.

He faced about, and without a word strode out into the sunshine.

It was rather a silent ride they took—that last ride together into Stellenbosch. Lawless was preoccupied, and the woman too appeared busy with her thoughts. She asked him once what he purposed doing if Van Bleit decided not to come up, and he answered shortly:

"If he doesn't come to me, I go to him."

She looked him straight in the eyes.

"You mean to best him, Grit," she said.

"Yes."

"Remember, I'm your lieutenant."

"Yes," he said again. And they fell into silence as before.

Van Bleit's answer acted somewhat as a set-back to their plans. Lawless had never contemplated the addition of Denzil to their numbers. It came altogether as a surprise.

"This complicates matters," he said. "Looks fishy . . . rather as though he had his doubts of me. And yet I'll swear when I last saw him——"

He broke off and thought about the matter.

"It won't be so easy to outwit two," he said. Then a smile of satisfaction dawned in his eyes. "It's safe

to predict, if they're both up here, we shall have a chance of seeing those letters. . . ."

Van Bleit and Denzil on their arrival hired a Cape cart from the town and drove the twenty miles across the veld. They congratulated themselves long ere they reached their destination on the foresight that had decided them to bring only a small amount of luggage.

"No man," Van Bleit observed to his companion, "could stick it here for long. What a cheek the fellow has to imagine a woman—and such a woman—is going to find his companionship sufficient to reconcile her to this sort of thing! It's not surprising Tottie scooted."

Denzil looked out across the unvarying scene with increasing dissatisfaction.

"Lots of chaps have the Turk in them. They'd like to veil their women," he returned, with no particular interest in the subject.

He was watching without appreciation the wonderful effects of the sunshine on the inimitable blending of colour in the veld, and the slowly moving shadows that swept across it where the clouds veiled the golden light. A soft wind was blowing, a wind that had the warm feel of the spring in it with its promise of early summer. The Cape winter was passing, going its way unmarked, even as it had come. But here on the high veld the nights were cold yet, and the crispness of the mornings still reminded a man of the feel of an English spring.

Van Bleit examined his finger-nails—which was a habit with him—and laughed.

"That would be all right if the women didn't prefer being looked at," he said. "The Turk will have to awake to the fact one day that the veil is out of fashion."

It was afternoon when they reached the shanty. They had had three stoppages on the journey owing to the breaking of different parts of the harness, that was,

native fashion, repaired with string. The horses were outspanned, and left to graze, while the coloured driver flung himself face downwards in the full rays of the sun to sleep for a couple of hours before making the return journey. Van Bleit settled with him, and bade him return for them in three days.

"Make it four," urged Lawless. "You're in a devil of a hurry to quit."

"I should think so," Van Bleit responded. But he made the alteration in the time. "What on earth do you do with yourself up here? I'd want to cut my throat if I stayed a week."

"Oh! it hasn't been half bad. I was getting a bit sick of my own company, though."

"All alone, eh?"

"All alone," Lawless answered. "It was all right while she was here; but the life was too domesticated for her taste. I was on the point of chucking it myself when I sent you that wire. It occurred to me that this might suit your book."

"Awfully decent of you," Van Bleit replied. But his eyes narrowed vindictively. He had a score to pay off against this man. His treatment at the hands of Mrs. Lawless was, he felt convinced, attributable to him somehow. Grit had played him false in more ways than one.

"It's not a bad little hutch," he said, as he looked round the interior.

"Oh! it's all right. . . . A bit cramped." Lawless threw open a door. "The bedrooms lead out," he explained,— "two of them. Boxes, of course; but they serve for single rooms. You and Denzil can make shift for a few nights. I'll bunk up in here."

Van Bleit walked into the bedroom.

"Nonsense!" he replied decidedly. "We aren't

turning you out of your room. Denzil and I will sleep together. I'll not hear of any other arrangement, Grit."

"As you like," Lawless answered.

Van Bleit went into the inner room.

"Check number one, Master Grit," he murmured. Aloud he said: "I'd like a wash, old man. And then, if you've anything to eat, we won't say no."

When they were alone together, Van Bleit drew Denzil's attention to the thinness of the partition between the two rooms, and laid a significant finger upon his lips.

"Leaks," he said, and winked expressively.

He put his eye to a crack in the boarding.

"That's where he'll spy upon us when he thinks we're unsuspecting," he whispered, coming back. Then, whistling cheerily, he divested himself of his coat and plunged his face into a basin of cold water.

Later, when, having eaten, they sat outside smoking and talking, while the sun dipped below the horizon and the low wind died away, Van Bleit spoke of his trial and the night at the bungalow, giving a word picture of the shooting which by constant repetition he was beginning to believe. The recital made him something of a hero, but it did not reflect well on Colonel Grey.

"It was a damned trap," he finished, and blew a cloud of smoke into the quiet air. "People who set traps for me are apt to find themselves ensnared."

"I knew Simmonds. He seemed a decent, harmless sort of chap," Lawless remarked after a pause. "I can't associate him with traps, somehow. He lent me ten pounds once, and never bothered me to return it. I'm glad to remember now that I settled my account with him."

"I've settled my account with him too," Van Bleit

rejoined. . . . "I don't go back on my word whatever the consequences."

He was growing excited. Denzil, whose impulses did not lead him into indiscretions, brought him up suddenly with the quietly uttered remark:

"No one could have been more upset than you were over Simmonds' death, dear fellow."

"That's a fact," Van Bleit returned readily. "It was a shock to me. But it was my life against his. I fancy most men value their own lives more highly than another's. Simmonds tricked me to the bungalow, and he paid the cost. He meant mischief. It isn't wise for any man to attempt that sort of game with me."

Lawless smoked in silence, and Denzil, under the pretext of getting a light for his pipe, nudged his friend significantly. Van Bleit in his excitement was giving himself away.

"Well, anyway," Van Bleit resumed more collectedly after a pause, "he's gone, poor devil! Let him RIP. My resentment doesn't cross the border." He laughed. "I require a certain amount of the commodity this side the Styx . . . most chaps do. I reckon you've got an enemy or so yourself, Grit?"

"I'm pretty well at enmity with all mankind," Lawless answered. "And my greatest enemy, I take it, is myself."

"That's rot," Van Bleit returned. "Every man has at least a sneaking affection for himself, and no enemy entertains the slightest regard for the object of his animosity."

"There is something in that," Lawless agreed, and thought for a moment. "Nevertheless, a man who makes enemies has an enemy in himself," he added with conviction. "It is so much easier to win friends."

"My experience hasn't tended to that conclusion,"

Van Bleit replied. "Friends are like the diamonds men dig out of the bowels of the earth at great expense of time and labour, valuable on account of their scarcity."

"You've had some good friends yourself, Karl," Denzil interposed with a wink. "Take Lawless, for instance. How many men would stay on in this God-forsaken hole solely to accommodate another?"

"There wasn't much sacrifice in that," Lawless replied. "The house is mine till the end of the month. So long as I can get anyone to bear me company there isn't any incentive to leave it. When you go I clear out also. I can't stick it here alone. The place has served its purpose. I've had a good time on the whole. But, as anyone can see, it's not intended for a single man. In all these weeks I haven't seen a soul besides yourselves, except for a party of prospectors who outspanned one night."

He rose and knocked the ash from his pipe. Away in the distance he had seen a pinpoint of light like a dull star low down upon the horizon, and he knew that Tottie had lighted her candle in the lonely hut quarter of a mile away. He planted himself between Van Bleit's vision and the hut.

"It's getting chilly," he said. "I've no particular fancy for watching the stars. Have you?"

"No," Van Bleit answered, and he and Denzil rose and accompanied their host indoors.

"It's a dashed sight more comfortable inside," he remarked.

Lawless drew the outer door to and fastened it. Neither of them had observed that pinpoint of flickering yellow light that was more like the elusive glimmer of a firefly than the luminous brilliance of a star. He wondered how he would have explained it had they remarked on the unexpected illumination in the hut.

XIX

THE following morning Lawless suggested a ride as the only entertainment he had to offer. There were only two mounts, he explained, and looked at Van Bleit. Van Bleit remarked that it would be fairly slow for the third man.

"Let's take our guns and tramp," he said. "There ought to be something in that bush yonder."

"There isn't," Lawless answered. "I've been there myself."

"It would give some sort of object for the walk," Van Bleit observed.

"I can loaf about here very well by myself," Denzil put in obligingly, missing the venom of the glance Van Bleit shot at him, a glance that Lawless intercepted and read aright. Van Bleit was not minded to trust himself alone in his company. There was not a shadow of doubt in his mind any longer that the Dutchman was suspicious of his intentions. It remained for him to lull those suspicions if possible.

"Come on, Karl," he said. "Take your gun with you if you're keen on potting things. But don't expect much. I've been over the ground too often to hamper myself with carrying a gun. I'll leave the killing to you. Sure you don't mind?" he asked, turning to Denzil.

"Not in the least. I'll potter about here. It's more in my line."

Van Bleit did not like the arrangement, but he went. When a man has a gun loaded in both barrels slung

across his shoulders, and a revolver charged in all six chambers in his right-hand pocket, he is fairly well provided against attack. It amused Lawless to observe how careful his companion was to ride on his left, and how persistently he kept his right hand in his pocket. He rode himself with both hands quite as ostentatiously displayed on the reins. Whenever he moved the right in the performance of the most simple office he was conscious of being observed until he returned it to its position on the rein. The knowledge that Van Bleit distrusted him gave him a peculiar sense of satisfaction. It was more to his liking to outwit a rogue who was prepared than to take advantage of a man's trust. He was glad to feel at this stage that they faced one another as foes.

During that ride, between the fragments of conversation, Lawless decided that on some such expedition as the present he would lead Van Bleit to a given place, and, with Tottie's assistance, overpower him and get hold of what he wanted. In view of the shortness of the time in which to carry out his designs, it was necessary to put his plans into prompt effect. He determined upon seeing Tottie that night. He would slip out when the others were asleep and make his way to the hut. Then, if he could induce Van Bleit to fall in with his arrangements in the morning, success would be fairly assured. His policy in the meantime was to allay Van Bleit's suspicions. In this he had succeeded fairly well so far. On the homeward journey Van Bleit rode most of the way with his right hand on his thigh; and once, Lawless noticed, when he plunged his own right hand into his pocket his companion did not appear in the least apprehensive. However much he doubted him, it was plain he had given up all thought of treachery on that occasion.

"I suggest we stick indoors and play cards this afternoon," Van Bleit proposed when they got back. He swung his heavy frame out of the saddle. "It's warm," he said.

Van Bleit was lucky at cards. He played for high stakes ; it was one of his varied methods of obtaining a livelihood. Certainly that afternoon he became no poorer. He and Denzil between them swept in the stakes.

"We'll give you your revenge," he said to Lawless.

And after supper they resumed their game and played far into the night. It was Lawless who eventually insisted on leaving off. He had been chafing for some time, thinking of his thwarted plans. Van Bleit, he knew, was likely enough to play through into the dawn. He pushed back his chair at last and rose.

"If you fellows don't want any sleep," he said, "I do. We've another day before us."

Van Bleit laughed, rose, and stretched himself with a huge yawn.

"Late, is it ? I never regard the time I spend over cards—or women," he said. He finished his glass of whisky and scooped in his gains. "To-morrow I'll give you a chance of winning some of this back."

Lawless lighted the candles.

"Right !" he said. "I have a feeling that the luck is on the turn."

"Then you ought to play on. . . . She's a fickle jade, and will change her mind in the daylight."

"I'll risk that. A man can't be expected to play cards if he's dead asleep."

Lawless' look of alertness when he was alone in the bedroom belied the plea of fatigue. He made such sounds and preparations as he deemed suitable for a man retiring to rest, and kicking off his boots, blew out

the light, and flung himself dressed upon the bed. He listened intently to the sounds from the adjoining room. The jerky scraps of conversation between the two men were perfectly audible to him. It was rather like people talking in the same apartment with a screen dividing them. It would require the exercise of the utmost caution to leave the house without arousing their attention.

"Old Grit always had the rottenest luck at cards," he heard Van Bleit mumbling. "But it's made up to him in other ways."

And Denzil in a sleepy drawl replied :

"Don't believe in luck. . . . When a man gets a thing it's because he goes for it in the right way."

Van Bleit's response to that sapience was a grunted "Good-night."

For a long while after they had ceased to talk Lawless lay still, staring wide-eyed into the darkness, until by the continued silence,—the heavy soundlessness that enwrapped the house like some listening mystery, he judged the two men were asleep. Nevertheless, it was very warily he slipped his stockinged feet to the floor and then stood up. Noiselessly, one step at a time, feeling his way in the darkness with the unerring judgment of a man who has already in the light measured the distance carefully from wall to wall, he crept towards the door. Cautiously as he proceeded, his hand came in contact with the rickety washstand, and in the general hush the noise he made, though slight enough, sounded tremendous in his imagination. It brought him up all standing, the pulses in his ears beating like so many hammers. He remained quite still and almost held his breath while he listened for the faintest movement from the next room, where Van Bleit and Denzil lay in the dark waiting, as he waited, until they felt

the time was ripe for discussing certain plans of their own.

Perfect silence reigned.

Lawless drew a slow breath of relief. There was no sound in the stillness other than that dull hammering of pulses in his ears. The noise he had made, he rightly conjectured, was not so audible as he had feared. But he did not mean running any risks ; and so he remained where he was, rigid, waiting, listening, while the minutes slipped away, and the silence, heavy, portentous of lurking evil, remained absolutely unbroken.

He was about to advance a further step when an extraordinary interruption occurred. Stealthily, as though the striker sought to stifle the sound, a match was rubbed lightly against its box, and the next instant a light shone through the chinks in the partition, and from the sounds Lawless judged that someone was getting off the bed, and that in so cautious a manner as to suggest that whoever it was he was anxious not to be heard. For a few moments Lawless suspected that his own movements had aroused attention, and he waited, quiet-eyed and grim, for the next move in the game. But after a while he began to think that he was altogether mistaken. The occupants in the next room were as anxious as he had been not to be overheard. They were whispering together, and one of them moved stealthily across the floor, and a sound that was like the crackle of paper reached Lawless' ears.

With even greater caution than he had used to cross the floor to the door he now retraced his steps and softly advanced towards the glimmer of light that showed through the chinks in the partition. He put his eye to the biggest crack. Van Bleit stood in his pyjamas beside the bed facing Lawless, a sealed packet, the sight of which gave the watcher a queer start, in his hand.

He was speaking to Denzil, who, sitting up in bed, listened attentively with his eyes on the speaker. Van Bleit spoke in so low a tone that had he been facing the other way it was doubtful that Lawless could have heard. As it was he only made out part of what was said.

"I daren't risk it," Van Bleit was murmuring. "I don't trust him . . . ride this morning. . . . If it hadn't been that I was armed he would . . . letters must be got out of this. . . ."

He began to speak more slowly and with greater distinctness.

"We'll wait for the dawn . . . there's no hurry. If he hears you, I'll say you have gone for a ride before breakfast . . . out of the window . . . no need to make a noise . . . ride slowly for the first half-mile, and keep going towards the bush. If he should happen to catch sight of you, he'd never suppose you were making for the town. I may be quite out in this, of course, but I have my suspicions . . . satisfied when those letters are safely out of . . ."

Lawless caught nothing more. But he had heard enough. He saw Denzil take charge of the packet, and he caught sight of the butt of a revolver sticking out obliquely from beneath the pillow.

He drew back softly, and smiled grimly to himself in the dark. Van Bleit in his eagerness to save the letters from falling into his hands was deliberately placing them there. The wily scoundrel had overreached himself.

He stepped softly back to the bed, and lying down, waited for the dawn. It seemed long in coming. And when at last the first pale glimmer of light showed wanly in the sky he began to think that sleep had overcome his companions. There was no stir from within. He lay

quite still, listening. After a while he fancied, but could not be sure, that he heard someone moving. He listened more attentively. Without a doubt someone was pattering about the floor in bare feet while he struggled into his clothes as noiselessly as possible. He heard the window-sash slide open, and raising himself and looking out, saw Denzil drop from the low sill and pass beneath his window. He gave him time to reach the stable and saddle a horse. Then he got up quietly and made his careful exit by the door.

Once outside his movements were less cautious. He hurried to the stable, and saddling the second horse, started in pursuit. He rode behind the house, trusting that Van Bleit if he heard would ascribe the sounds to Denzil, and followed the directions he had heard given in the whispered instructions of the previous night.

It was not long before he descried his quarry. Denzil was riding easily, as a man rides for exercise with no particular object in view. He did not once turn his head to look back, but jogging quietly on his way made steadily for the dense cover behind the hut. Lawless quickened his pace and overtook him about a mile from the house. On hearing someone behind him Denzil looked round, and reining in his horse waited for him to come up.

"Hallo!" he said, a trifle uneasily, it seemed to Lawless. "You're early astir. I thought I had the day to myself."

"Any objection," Lawless asked, "to a companion on your ride?"

Denzil laughed awkwardly.

"On the contrary," he said. "I hate riding alone. But I thought you chaps were dead asleep. This to my thinking is the best time of the day."

"Yes," Lawless agreed. "I usually ride before the sun is up."

They drew abreast, and walked their horses alongside the dense bush. Denzil talked continuously as a man might who was ill at ease and anxious to gain time. It was evident to Lawless that he scented danger, and would gladly have been without his companionship. Once or twice he looked about him furtively, as though some idea of flight possessed his mind; but either his nerve was not equal to the attempt or the possibility of being mistaken in his deductions suggested the prudence of awaiting developments.

The development, when it came, was startling and unpleasant.

He had been looking about him in his furtive, shifty, nervous way, as though wishful yet fearful of attempting escape, when suddenly facing about, impelled by some force other than conscious volition, he found himself staring blankly into the shining barrel of a revolver.

"If you so much as lift a finger," Lawless said coolly, "I'll blow your brains out. Halt!"

The horses came to a standstill. Lawless, still covering the other man, freed his foot from the stirrup and swung himself out of the saddle.

"Dismount!" he said, standing with the rein over his left arm, the right raised with the revolver gripped in his hand.

Denzil reddened, but complied with the curt command.

"What's your game?" he stuttered, as he stood on the veld facing that business-like weapon at uncomfortably close quarters. "What are you up to?"

"Hands up!" Lawless said. And Denzil, alarmed and reluctant, held his hands high above his head.

"I'll not keep you in that undignified and uncomfortable position longer than necessary," Lawless went on.

"It depends upon yourself how long you have to endure the annoyance. You have in your possession a packet of letters which it is my intention to relieve you of. You will save me trouble, and yourself continued inconvenience, by telling me in which pocket I shall find what I require."

"Oh! that's it, is it?" Denzil smiled uneasily. "You might have spared yourself trouble. Van Bleit has the packet. He wouldn't trust it with me."

Lawless dropped the rein, leaving it hanging down in front of the forelegs after the Colonial custom with standing horses, and advanced upon the speaker.

"If you waste my time by lying," he said, "I'll shoot you. Which pocket is it in?"

Denzil's eyes snapped; but he was too genuinely alarmed at the cold feel of the revolver against his temples to attempt further procrastination.

"Breast . . . right-hand side," he answered shortly.

"This spells ruin for me," he muttered, as Lawless plunged his left hand inside his coat and drew out the sealed packet Van Bleit had given into his charge in the bedroom a few hours before. "I don't know how I'll face Karl. He'll be for shooting me himself."

"He's had one escape from hanging," Lawless responded drily; "he'll not risk a second."

He withdrew to a short distance, briefly examined the packet, and slipped it into his own breast pocket with an extraordinary sense of exultation. He had succeeded where others had failed. He had boasted to Colonel Grey that he would get the letters or kill his man, and here were the letters that had cost so much safely in his possession. . . .

He walked to where he had left his horse standing, and putting his foot in the stirrup, vaulted into the

saddle. Then he gathered up his rein, and caught at the rein of the other horse.

"You can lower your hands," he said; "but be careful what you do with them; I'm not uncovering you yet."

Denzil dropped his hands to his sides, and watched with considerable interest the movements of the man who had so completely outwitted him.

"You are leaving me to tramp it, I suppose?" he said.

"I'm depriving you and Van Bleit of the means of following me," was the brief answer.

"Van Bleit will never believe how entirely you surprised me," Denzil returned dejectedly. "He'll think I ought to have stuck to the packet at all costs. Man, I wonder if you know the value of what you've got there? Look here! . . . Stop a bit! . . ." His manner became eager and confidential. "Can't we do a deal, you and I? . . . Let me stand in with you—or, better still, give me a sum down, and I'll let you into the know how to work those letters to the best advantage. . . . What do you say, eh?"

"What I have to say won't interest you," Lawless replied. "If I hadn't passed my word, I wouldn't touch the damned letters, and the first thing I mean to do with them is to get rid of their charge. . . . But not to you. . . . If you had your deserts you would find yourself on the breakwater. Now, march!" he added. "Turn your back, and keep going."

He had hardly issued the order when something happened that put an altogether different aspect upon the face of things. Inexplicably, he saw Denzil grinning as he abruptly turned about, and the next moment something hurtled through the air and fell about his shoulders, tightening with a suddenness that pinned his

arms to his sides. The revolver flew from his hand, and simultaneously he was jerked violently out of the saddle. He fell heavily to the accompaniment of raucous laughter, and, lying on the veld, straining impotently at the cords that held him, he realised with bitter mortification that Karl Van Bleit had securely lassoed him by a cowboy trick he was an adept in.

XX

“CHECK number two, Master Grit Lawless!”

Van Bleit stood over his victim with a smile of satisfaction widening his features, the end of the long rope which he had used to such purpose coiled upon his arm. He took a shorter length from his pocket and tossed it to Denzil, who, in thorough appreciation of the trick, was still laughing immoderately over the discomfiture of the man who had believed himself upper dog. Lawless sat up and swore vigorously.

“Fasten his wrists,” Van Bleit commanded.

He twirled the ends of his moustache complacently while he watched the execution of this order, and offered a few suggestions for the more efficacious tightening of the bonds.

“Oh! you can squirm as much as you like,” he said. “You are about as helpless as a trussed fowl.”

When Lawless’ hands were securely bound behind him, Van Bleit loosened the noose that had tightened until it stopped the circulation, and drew the loop over the captive’s head. Then he picked up the revolver that lay on the veld and sat down facing him. He was enjoying himself immensely. The security of his position as captor, Lawless’ utter helplessness, and the certainty of no outside interference, completed a situation which, having no element of risk about it, appealed to him amazingly. He rested his right elbow on his knee, and levelled the revolver at Lawless’ breast.

“It would be so simple and so safe to settle you

for ever," he remarked pleasantly, "that I wonder I don't do it. . . . Denzil, just hobble those left-overs from the Ark. We shall need them presently. They look as though they'd stand till the crack of doom, but there's just a chance that if this revolver should happen to go off we might lose them, and that would be awkward. When you have done that you can relieve long-eared Grit of what he sneaked from you."

Lawless set his teeth and said nothing. He was beginning to understand that while he had been busy trying to devise a trap for Van Bleit, the Dutchman had got ahead of him, and that in so wily a manner that he had not had the faintest suspicion of trickery when he had listened at the partition with his eye to the crack. And yet the mere lighting of the candle should have warned him. . . . There would have been no need for a light had it not been intended that he should see. He cursed his folly for tumbling into a pit the digging of which he had been permitted to witness. And the letters! . . . The letters that he had been allowed to handle, that he believed he had got so secure. . . .

When Denzil bent over him and drew the sealed packet from his pocket, he made a frantic but futile effort to burst the bonds that fastened his wrists. The rope, already uncomfortably tight, cut into the flesh and caused such pain he was fain to desist. Denzil dangled the packet before his face, jeering, then he gripped it tighter and struck him with it across the eyes.

"One day," Lawless said grimly, "when my hands aren't tied, you'll pay for that."

Van Bleit laughed loudly. The bully in him enjoyed watching aggression that feared no retaliation. To strike a man with his hands tied was infinitely amusing.

"Thought you had a wonderful find in that packet,

eh?" he sneered. "Going to make your fortune—were you?—in another man's gold mine."

"I shouldn't have objected to that idea so much," Denzil interposed in a tone of deep disgust. "But he wouldn't confess to that. . . . He was posing virtuous."

"Ah!" returned Van Bleit, grinning. "Looks virtuous, don't he? . . . Job on his rubbish heap! Well, it may ease his virtuous mind to know that so far as the value of that packet is concerned he might be allowed to keep it. It's a fake, old man . . . got up for your amusement, and that of other fellows of an inquiring turn of mind. Almachtig! you don't imagine I'm so green as to carry around letters that are worth a fortune?" He snapped his fingers in derision. "For a cute boy, Grit, you are surprisingly credulous. Those letters that so many mouths are watering for are safe—where you won't get them. I don't cart them round in my suit-case."

He laughed again at the expression of Lawless' face.

"Sold all round, eh? Lord! ain't it funny?"

Then, his mood changing suddenly, he fell to scowling, and eyed Lawless malevolently above the revolver that still pointed direct at his heart.

"You fancy because Tom Hayhurst got hold of them once, it's any man's job. Well, it isn't. And Tom wouldn't have had the chance, only I was fool enough to bring them from Jo'burg to Cape Town. I deserved to lose them for not leaving them safe where they were. But I'm not taking any further risks. That packet of dummy letters is all I carry about. . . . And I carry them with a purpose—the purpose of discovering such treacherous scoundrels as yourself. You're in Grey's pay. I know that. . . . I found it out long ago. And you profess friendship for me . . . start out to win my confidence with the intention of robbing me—killing

me, perhaps. You deserve to pay dearly for that. I've half a mind to shoot you. . . . I'll punish you somehow."

He got up, and, pocketing the revolver, approached menacingly. Lawless watched him in silence. Van Bleit, it was clear, meant mischief; and he was powerless to defend himself, incapable of hitting back. The knowledge of his helplessness galled him unspeakably. To have had his hands free! . . . just his bare hands, and nothing more. . . .

"It's a safe game you're playing," he observed drily. "If I faced you with my bare fists you wouldn't take this tone."

"Safe game or not," Van Bleit shouted, "I'm going to punish you, my boy. There's a treatment for treachery that has been found efficacious before."

He snatched at a riding-whip which one of the men had dropped, and struck the strong quiet face he hated again and again with it, raising a dozen weals on the thin tanned cheeks. One blow cut Lawless' lip open, and the blood spurted out and ran down his chin, and stained the blonde moustache. At each blow he winced though he made no sound, but the wince gave Van Bleit immense satisfaction. The score he had to pay off against this man was heavy. To his influence he attributed the coldness of Zoë Lawless. . . . That could only be expiated with his life; but the taking of human life meant a risk Karl Van Bleit would not again lightly undertake. He had a morbid horror of the hangman's rope since it had dangled so perilously near his own neck.

When he had flogged Lawless in the face, he flogged him again across the shoulders with even greater venom. This being borne without flinching, soon ceased to amuse him, and he flung the whip from him with an oath.

"That's enough for the present, damn you! If we meet again you'll know what to expect. I shan't spare your life a second time. . . . It's almost a pity," he reflected, inclination weighing against discretion, "to lose this chance of quieting you. Who's to know if I settle your account for ever?"

For the next few seconds Lawless felt his life hung in the balance. His whole being revolted against the thought of death at this man's hands without ever a chance of repaying the insult he had suffered. If his life were spared that day he vowed he would never rest until he had squared their account finally. Some idea of this probability seemed to possess Van Bleit, and inclined him strongly toward committing the foul deed he contemplated; but Denzil, the more timorous, stood out against murder.

"There are the horses, Karl," he urged. . . . "Any amount of awkward questions may be asked."

"All right," Van Bleit said shortly. "We'll leave him as he is. It will take him all he knows to worry his hands free."

He struck his foe again in the face with his open hand, and turning away, walked towards the horses. He mounted, and Denzil following his example, they rode off, leaving their victim seated on the veld, his wrists securely bound, without, so far as they knew, any prospect of freeing them, and with no available means of pursuit. It was a safe game, as Lawless had said.

He remained seated until they were out of sight. Not on any consideration would he have given Van Bleit the satisfaction of watching him rise and proceed on his way with his arms in their present undignified position. When the two men finally disappeared from view he got up, and walking painfully, for the fall from his horse had injured him, made his way slowly back

towards the hut. The riders had passed quite close behind it after climbing the rise, little guessing that it was tenanted. The noise of the horses' hoofs awoke Tottie. She rubbed her eyes, and half sat up, and so, resting on her elbow, remained still, listening, till the sounds died away in the distance and complete silence reigned once more. No suspicion crossed her mind that anything was amiss.

"Grit's early astir," her thoughts ran as she settled down to sleep again.

She was half-wakeful, half-dozing, when something happened that roused her fully and brought the languid eyes open with a jerk. Abruptly, without warning, the light from the doorless exit was obscured, and a man's figure, bending from the waist, entered, and, straightening itself, stood upright, looking uncertainly about with eyes unaccustomed to the dimness, upon unfamiliar surroundings.

Tottie sat up on her improvised mattress of bush and dried rushes and stared in amaze at the appearance presented by the intruder. The swollen, inflamed face with the ugly weals across it was scarcely recognisable, the blood running down the chin on to the front of his shirt gave it a savage, even a sinister look, that was strangely repellent. She wondered why he made no effort to wipe the blood away, and noticed that he kept his hands behind him, but did not realise that this was owing to compulsion, until he turned suddenly about and requested her shortly to undo the "damned knots."

"Good God! Grit," she said, "what's happened?"

"Van Bleit's scored this time," he answered. "It's first game to him. . . . But the rubber isn't won yet. I've merely got my deserts for being a gullible idiot."

She worked at the knots with her teeth, and after a

while unbound his raw and bleeding wrists and flung the rope to the floor.

"My word ! but they've used you ill," she said. . . .
"If I'd only guessed. . . ."

Lawless made no response. He was peering with half-blinded eyes at a huddled object on the ground that he had taken for a bundle of old rags, but now that his sight was growing used to the obscurity discovered to be the sleeping form of a native woman, who lay curled up against the mud wall, like an animal, with her superb arms flung high above her head. She was either fast asleep or feigning slumber, for she made neither sound nor movement, but lay like a dead woman, save for the gentle rise and fall of her bosom under the ochre blanket that formed its sole covering.

"What is the meaning of that ?" he said sternly, pointing to the recumbent figure, his burning gaze on Tottie's face.

She laughed with a slight embarrassment. In the surprise of his entry she had forgotten that the woman was there.

"Oh ! that's all right," she answered jerkily. "Couldn't turn her out, you know. . . . The hut belongs to her—in a way. She happened along the first evening, and was for running like a scared rabbit at sight of me, but——" Tottie laughed again. "Even a nigger is companionable," she said.

Lawless looked hard at her.

"She's raw," Tottie explained. . . . "Zulu . . . only speaks her own tongue. I know a few words, and so we rub along."

"And her belongings ?" Lawless asked. "Has it occurred to you that there's a nigger husband somewhere ? If she makes this place her home she doesn't live alone here."

"He hasn't shown up so far," Tottie answered comfortably. She touched significantly a holster at her waist. "I'm not scared of niggers, Grit."

"Well, it doesn't matter," he said. "You've done with this. Van Bleit's gone—Denzil too. . . . And they've taken the horses. It's twenty miles to the town, but we've got to do it."

Tottie looked thoughtful.

"There's a nearer way than that, baas," she said. She jerked her head in the direction of the sleeping native. "There's some sort of a farm within reasonable walking distance. . . . *She* makes the journey for sour milk. They'd let us have a conveyance if we paid enough, I expect. . . . It's better than tramping, anyhow. We'll rouse her, and make her show us the way."

She stood up, shook out the folds of her skirt, and surveyed herself in the glass she had brought from the house and hung by a nail on the wall. One cheek was hectic with artificial colour, the other, on which she had been lying, was white and red in streaks.

"What a guy!" she murmured. "I'll need to repair the ravages before we start, old man. . . . You wouldn't look any the worse for a wash yourself."

She laid a hand affectionately on his arm.

"We'll wipe out that score—you and I—pretty thoroughly. It's come to a point now where I shall be able to help. It won't do for you to follow him, because, plainly, he'll be expecting you. He'll be on the look out. I don't know whether you've got a plan, but I have. We won't follow him. . . . He shall follow me." She chuckled wickedly. "I've always had an idea I should elope with old Karl. . . . You go back to Cape Town, Grit, and leave this to me. When I've got him safely in tow, I'll communicate with you, and you can drop down on us and finish him, if necessary."

Lawless regarded her earnestly.

"How will you get on his trail?" he asked.

She smiled significantly.

"I'm going to turn up in the same town; then, if I know anything of him, the pursuit will be all on his side. You must give me a cheque for something killing in the way of a trousseau. . . . I'll manage the rest."

He appeared not altogether pleased with the arrangement.

"You'll overplay the part," he objected.

"You trust me," she answered confidently.

"Besides, he doesn't carry the letters on him. . . . He boasted this morning that they were safely out of reach."

She turned round from the glass to stare at him.

"Then what's the good—— Well, in any case," she finished, in the manner of one who clinches an argument, "there's got to be a settlement over that bashed face of yours."

XXI

LATE that afternoon, with their scant belongings, Lawless and his companion drove into Stellenbosch in the broken-sprunged buggy which, after much persuasion, they had induced the owner of the farm to which the Zulu woman had led them to hire out to them.

The difficulty had arisen, not from disinclination to oblige a stranger, but on account of having no spare hand to act as driver. In the end the farmer drove them himself, not because he could best spare the time, but because he knew he was least likely to waste it. He and a small son of the house harnessed the horse, while Lawless looked on, and Tottie waited in the shade of the stoep where the farmer's wife sewed, and eyed her askance, responding distantly to her tentatives towards conversation.

Afterwards she observed to her husband:

"I was glad you gave in over the buggy. It was a relief when that woman was out of sight. One could have grown a crop of mealies in the dirt on her face, only nothing so wholesome could thrive in such rubbish. I didn't see her left hand because she kept her gloves on; but if there was a wedding-ring on every finger, I'd know she wasn't married to that man. It's one of those cases one recognises by instinct."

"The man's no good either," the farmer answered. . . .
"Been fighting—unless he drinks, and she mauled him like that when he couldn't defend himself. She looks capable of it. . . . She's fond of him too. Did you

notice how she helped him into the cart, seeing he was a bit sick ? ”

“ Oh, that ! ” The wife looked unconvinced. “ She’s probably afraid of him when he’s sober ; he’s a savage-looking man.”

“ Well, I’m glad we’re quit of them,” he returned. “ One’s best without neighbours if one can’t have them respectable. . . . But they paid me well.”

“ Ah ! he’s one of that sort,” she responded . . . “ more money than morals. The want of money’s a curse, and the having it is a curse as often as not.”

“ The latter,” her husband said, smiling, “ is a curse that would be to my taste.”

She smiled too.

“ That’s because you know you’ll never have it, you old stodger, you.”

Lawless learnt on inquiry after arriving in Stellenbosch that Denzil and Van Bleit had separated, the former having departed earlier for the coast, while Van Bleit had left only a quarter of an hour before they arrived. He had taken a ticket for Worcester.

“ That, then, is my destination,” Tottie announced, when he told her the result of his investigations.

“ Better take a ticket for a couple of stations beyond, and work your way back to Worcester,” he advised.

“ Not a bad idea,” she returned readily. “ But I’m going to stay a couple of days here with you before running after Karl.”

“ What for ? ” he asked. “ It’s losing time.”

“ You’re a bit keen to get rid of me, Grit,” she said.

He wheeled round abruptly and took her by the arm.

“ Don’t get any of those fool ideas into your head,” he said quickly. “ When we’ve put this job successfully through, we’ll go on the spree together—to Jo’burg,

or anywhere you've a fancy for. You're a first-class chum."

She flushed with pleasure even through the paint, and emitted a little awkward laugh.

"I'd enjoy that more than enough. Just ourselves, and no need for this fooling round. But I'd like to stay and do first aid for twenty-four hours, anyhow. . . . You won't go down to the coast with your face like that?"

"Then, stay," he said, giving in with the spiritless manner of a man unequal to further contention. "I'll be glad enough of your company. I'm stiff and sore and jolly well out of conceit with myself. If anyone can reinstate me in my own opinion it's you."

They put up at the hotel, and Tottie, whose ideas of first aid were practical if crude, was only deterred from putting them into effect by Lawless' irritable refusal to be touched. He bathed his sore and swollen face himself with warm water, and swore at the stiffness and its unfamiliar contours. In the morning the face was even less comfortable than on the day of assault, and he could not see out of one eye. But he was firm in insisting that Tottie should start on her journey. He bought her ticket and saw her off by the train. She parted from him reluctantly, and leaning half-way out of her compartment as the train was moving out, called to him:

"Go and see a doctor, Grit. I don't like that eye of yours."

He nodded to her, and because he was in haste to be rid of the inconvenience of his injury, took her advice; and for the next few days was forced to go about wearing a shade, to his no small discomfort and disgust.

As soon as he was able to dispense with the shade he started for Cape Town.

A strong south-east was blowing when he reached the capital. The pavements were greasy and wet, and the sticky thickness of the atmosphere, laden with salt and a mist that swept in from the sea, clung to his garments, and wetted his face and hair as with fine rain. He took a cab and drove to his hotel. The management seemed relieved to see him back. There had been several inquiries, and one or two letters had arrived during his absence. These they could not forward, having no address.

He took the letters and went to his room with them. They were for the greater part unimportant, bills most of them. There were one or two personal communications, and one imperative epistle marked, "Private. Please Forward," from Colonel Grey. The wording of it was brief :

"DEAR MR. LAWLESS,—I stand in urgent need of your services and advice. Kindly report yourself at the earliest possible.—
Yours faithfully, F. W. GREY."

Lawless glanced at the date of the letter ; it was more than a month old. He smiled drily. Doubtless Colonel Grey would consider it a tardy response were he to present himself at the bungalow that night, and yet there could be no more prompt compliance with a command.

He changed his dusty garments, dined, and having no inclination for walking on so damp and boisterous a night, hired a taxi and drove the mile and a half to the quiet road where Colonel Grey's bungalow stood in its wild, luxuriant garden behind the unclipped hedges of plumbago. He dismissed the taxi, and walking up the path to the stoep made for a window where a light was burning, and tapped upon the glass. There was an immediate response from within. Lawless

heard someone move and walk heavily across the floor, then the French window was flung wide, and Colonel Grey himself stood in the aperture facing him with an expression of cold surprise and inquiry in his look.

"I got your letter," Lawless explained, "to-night. I am here in accordance with the request contained in it."

"Come inside."

Colonel Grey moved aside for him to pass, and, closing the window, sat down. It was not the same room in which Lawless had been received before; that, on the other side of the hall, had been locked since the shooting affray. He dropped into an easy-chair opposite his host. He was tired with travelling and was glad to stretch his limbs, but the older man, with his ingrained ideas of discipline, taking note of the relaxed attitude, drew his own inference. He frowned as he sat straighter himself.

"After all this while I had given up every expectation of seeing you again," he said in a curt manner that betrayed his disapprobation. "You have not, I imagine, brought me any special news?"

"I have not," Lawless answered. "All the happenings have been going forward here during my absence. I have come to receive, not to give, explanations."

The frown on the Colonel's brow showed heavier and more fierce. He sat forward and stared at the speaker, who, still relaxing his inert muscles, lay indolently back in his chair.

"Damn your impudence!" he said. "What do you mean by that?"

"Why," asked Lawless imperturbably, "were you so anxious a month ago for my services and advice?"

"It was before Van Bleit's trial I wrote that letter. . . . If you'd been on the spot we'd have hanged the brute."

"And why was my presence necessary to the carrying out of justice?"

The Colonel pulled savagely at his moustache. He was thinking, not so much of his present annoyance, but of the chance he believed had been lost of getting hold of the letters. He had come to consider it a practical certainty that had Lawless remained at his post success would have been achieved. He looked at the thin, scarred face, at the indolent grace of the outstretched limbs, and his strong sense of indignation, of having been somehow defrauded, increased. He had paid well for this man's services; he had a right to command them.

"Plainly, I couldn't hang him before getting hold of the letters," he said. "It might have been defeating my own ends. Had you been on the spot—as I had every right to expect you to be—we could have recovered them."

"Do you happen to know where they are?" Lawless asked.

"Denzil had them then. . . . And Denzil without Van Bleit would be easy to deal with."

The man lounging in the chair suddenly sat up.

"You've been misinformed," he said. "Denzil never had those letters at any time in his charge. Van Bleit doesn't trust him . . . he's wise not to. We've assumed too much because Hayhurst got hold of them once. . . . That is the first and only time Van Bleit has risked having them in his possession. Those letters are safe—where you and I can't get them. Van Bleit alone can touch them." He laughed shortly. "The search has narrowed considerably since we met."

"What the devil are you driving at? . . . You talk as though you know where the letters are," the Colonel said sharply.

"So I do, man. . . . They're in the Bank, of course."

"In the Bank!" There was silence for a few seconds. Then in a voice that had lost its quick tone of authority Colonel Grey asked quietly: "How do you know?"

"Know! I don't know. . . . And yet I do know. Where would *you* keep important papers that you feared might be stolen? . . . where would I? . . . In the Bank, of course. I wonder we never thought of it before. It was Hayhurst misled us. Because he got hold of them, we took Van Bleit for a fool—which he isn't. . . . Scoundrel every inch of him, but no fool. I had it from himself that the letters were safe from us. He didn't mean to give me a clue. . . . I jumped to it. I've had him staying with me since his acquittal."

He laughed mirthlessly at the expression of astonishment in his listener's face, and, as though the recollection of his recent meeting with Van Bleit excited him, got up from his chair and took a turn the length of the room, and then came back.

"I thought I had a good game on . . . that I had only to get hold of Van Bleit and the letters were mine," he said. "You nearly upset my plans by that unexpected move of yours which cost so dear in the end. . . . As it chanced, it wouldn't have mattered had you frustrated them altogether. What made you interfere, as you did, when you had entrusted me with the affair?"

He paused in front of the Colonel, and waited for his answer, regarding him fixedly with his keen, penetrating eyes. The Colonel appeared, not so much unequal, as disinclined to reply.

"I thought you had lost your head," he said at last. "Your manner of leaving Cape Town was not calculated to inspire confidence."

"And that's the reason you failed to pay the amount agreed upon into my account last month?"

"That was my reason—yes." He stared back into the dominating, inscrutable grey eyes, and his own were stern and unyielding. "You've come to me to-night with a request for more money, I suppose?"

"I have. I'm short—in debt, in fact. I must have something at once to go on with."

There was a perceptible pause. The Colonel ended it.

"I'm not paying for work that isn't performed," was his curt response to this appeal. "You'll have to satisfy me that you are earning your pay before you get anything further. Suppose you give an account of what you have done up to the present,—of what you purpose doing in the near future that justifies a further outlay. There has been nothing but a verbal agreement between us, which is no more binding on one side than on the other—save for the final agreement you hold for a sum down when you deliver, or cause to be delivered, the packet of letters into my hands. When I undertook to make you a monthly allowance, it was on the understanding that you pursued your quest with conscientious persistence; there was no question of leisure for the following of your amusements. I have not been exacting in demanding hitherto a full account of service rendered in exchange for money received. It has occurred to me that you might have given a fuller account than you have done unasked."

"Probably I should have," Lawless replied, "had I not been perfectly aware of the distrust with which you regard me, which you have never succeeded in controlling or concealing since you first engaged my services. You have—whether intentionally or not, I can't say—insulted me more than enough. You have openly ques-

tioned my honesty. And you expect me to swallow all that—for a consideration. . . . And I do swallow it. . . . Why ? . . . I hardly know. . . . For the consideration, perhaps.”

He moved away to the window, halted there, and turned sharply upon his heel.

“ You want to hear what I’ve done,” he said, coming back, and hovering uncertainly between a small table on which a lamp burnt and the chair from which he had risen. He was too excited to seat himself. Colonel Grey watched him curiously, the old struggle between liking for the man and distrust of him still battling for the supremacy. It was odd that, in spite of the distrust, in face of prejudice, the liking remained. “ I’ve been in the Stellenbosch district ever since leaving Cape Town——”

“ Alone ? ” interrupted the Colonel.

“ Not alone—no ! . . . I went there solely on your business——”

“ With a companion ? ”

Lawless swore at this further interruption.

“ Damn it ! . . . yes,” he answered almost violently. —“ On your business—with a companion. And, what’s more to the point, that same companion is following up Van Bleit now.”

The Colonel leant forward and stared at the speaker aghast.

“ That—that *woman* ! ” he spluttered.

“ Have a care ! ” Lawless said curtly. “ The agent that I have employed is working for my sake, not for yours ; and is likely to prove more successful than either you or I could hope to be at the present stage of affairs. Van Bleit recognises an enemy in me.”

“ I won’t have it,” the Colonel shouted. “ You were not justified in employing an agent on your own

authority. . . . A—woman like that is not to be trusted on such a delicate mission. The letters would be as dangerous in her possession as they are in Van Bleit's. . . . You are a fool if you believe she would hand them over to you. . . . She mustn't be allowed to get hold of them."

"She won't," Lawless replied calmly. "You forget, I tell you he hasn't them in his charge."

"How can you possibly be sure of that? . . . And if it's true, where's the use in following him?"

"At our first meeting," Lawless reminded him, and took one of his short sharp turns between the table and chair and back again, "when I undertook this job, I told you that if I failed in getting the letters I would kill your man. . . . That's what I'm after now. I'm keener on it than on anything else."

Colonel Grey sat back in his seat and crossed one knee over the other.

"You need reminding in your turn that you are not paid to follow your inclination. . . . Will you please go on with the story? I am curious to learn how it came about that Van Bleit boasted to you that the letters were out of our reach. What grounds have you for assuming such a statement to be true?"

"Grounds!" Lawless laughed again, with a savage sound in the mirth. His mind had reverted to the scene on the veld in the early morning when Van Bleit had sat with a revolver covering him, and a murderous finger crooked round the trigger. "I have had what I believed to be those letters in my hands—a dummy packet got up in order to trick me. I fell into the trap with an ease that astounds me when I think of it. I've been flogged like a Kaffir—by Van Bleit . . . bound by the wrists and lashed." He touched his inflamed and injured eye. "I haven't recovered the proper use of

that yet," he said. "I doubt that I ever shall. What little self-respect I had he has deprived me of. . . . Perhaps that's why I don't care a damn when you openly question my honesty. That's a full report of my doings, up to the present. I am now waiting until my decoy has got Van Bleit in tow—then I am going to face him again."

He fell to pacing the floor once more with his hands clasped behind him, and his eyes filled with an expression of uncontrollable hate.

"When a man holds life cheaply—as I do,—when he's nothing to look forward to, and very little to look back upon, he makes an ugly enemy. . . . You know something—not much, but still something—of my past. As I've gone along Life's High Road there has been a hand occasionally to rest in mine for a brief while; but at the first stumble it has been withdrawn,—not one has ever clasped mine more firmly to help me over the difficulties in the way. . . . I'm not whining to you in self-excuse. I've knocked up against hard facts all my life. . . . I'm hard myself, which may account for much. If it were not for a military training, I should probably hit you in the face when you accuse me of applying to my own use the money I have received from you. As it is, I ask you to withdraw that charge. It's possibly the only creditable thing I have achieved in life, but I have managed to steer clear of fraud."

He put a hand in his breast pocket, and, withdrawing a notebook, took from between its leaves a paper which he tossed upon the table.

"There's the agreement you referred to a while since. . . . You can tear it across; it's not worth the paper it's written on. I'll stick to my part of the bargain. I'll get the letters for you, if they're to be got. But I want no other reward than the squaring of my account

with Van Bleit. For the rest—the funds to go on with——”

The Colonel stopped him with a gesture, and, rising, crossed to a desk near the window. He unlocked a drawer, took from it a cheque-book, and drawing up a cheque in Lawless' favour, and signing it, passed it to him with a pen to fill in the amount. Lawless supplied the figures.

“The usual sum,” he said. . . . “And a month in arrears.”

Colonel Grey nodded. Then he re-locked the desk and rose.

“I have doubted you,” he said. “I admit it. But——”

“Oh! what in hell does it matter?” Lawless interrupted roughly. “I don't know why I have grown so suddenly sensitive on the point of my honour. . . . And what's the use of words? You would probably skirt the question as nicely as a politician, but the fact remains—you distrust me still.”

Later, when he was alone, the Colonel pondered the subject for an hour while he smoked before retiring to bed. Did he absolutely distrust the man? Were not his suspicions wearing down? He had no knowledge what was wearing them—certainly not that ill-considered act on Lawless' part in throwing up the formal agreement between them. He picked up the agreement, but instead of tearing it across, he locked it away in the desk. Its repudiation had been the final struggle after the respect he had spoken of as lost to him on the part of one who had wanted above all else to stand well in this man's regard, and who felt that he had failed in that as in most things.

XXII

IT is not only in the heroic moments of life that the depth of human feeling is sounded; occasionally in the simple and seemingly commonplace incident the stress of emotion is greater than at times of a higher mental tension. Tragedy passes often unsuspected, and the eye of the casual observer rests without recognition on many intimate crises in the destiny of the race. It is well that this is so. The heart that is wounded prefers to cover its scars, and the breast that holds a sorrow carries usually a jealous dread of discovery. For the eye of the world is unsympathetic towards what it fails to understand. As the searching light of the sun reveals not only the beauties of life but all its sordid inequalities, so the judgment of humanity rests upon the obvious and appraises and condemns with relentless indiscrimination. When Eve ate of the Tree of Knowledge of Good and Evil, she did not eat largely enough. We recognise Good and Evil, but we miss the finer shades.

It was but a commonplace incident that happened in the square close to Parliament buildings on the morning following Lawless' return to Cape Town, but for the two people concerned it marked a moment of intense significance,—a moment during which for them their world stood still. Quite a number of eyes witnessed the meeting, but in the slight encounter there was nothing to excite the faintest interest or comment—merely the swift advance of a motor car, to allow which to pass

the tall man with the scarred face, who was crossing the square at the moment, was obliged to fall back a few paces, or risk being run down. The occupant of the car looked straight into his eyes for the fraction of time occupied in passing, and unsmiling, with white set face, slightly inclined her head. He raised his hat, his own face quite as gravely set, and standing where he was, with the dust of the road which the car had raised upon his clothes, looked after it till it whirled out of sight.

"Beastly things!" a stranger remarked to him sympathetically. . . . "Jolly nice when you're in 'em, but spoil the roads for pedestrians."

Lawless nodded, and stepping on the pavement pursued his way. The spring sunshine poured warmly on the glaring white surface in the square, and bathed in a yellow radiance the fine façades of the block of buildings where the administrative affairs of the Colony are directed. It was still blowing from the south-east, and little whirlpools of dust rose in unexpected places, catching in their vortex any straying scrap of paper, whirling it giddily and then ejecting it, or subsiding with it in untidy heaps that the next gust disturbed and roused into fresh activity.

Lawless walked in aimless fashion along the street. Time, since he had nothing to do but wait, hung heavy on his hands. The men he had known before fought shy of him, less, he felt, for what he had done than the public manner of the doing. If one sin, sin secretly, was their gospel. And what he had done had been done in the light of day before the eyes of all men. It is easy when one lives in the world to become a cynic.

He left the busier thoroughfares and turned into the road that led past the Weebers' house. There was one person in Cape Town, he knew, who viewed his failures leniently, and just then he was curiously eager to meet

her. He had not sufficient effrontery to call at the house, but he passed it slowly, and even retraced his steps and passed it a second time, without, however, the result he had hoped for. Disappointed, he returned to his hotel.

It was a surprise encounter when eventually he met her. He was walking along the road one afternoon towards Rondebosch when she overtook him on her cycle as she had done once before, only on this occasion she was not alone. Young Bolitho was riding with her, and they both carried tennis rackets slung on the handle-bars of their machines.

She did not recognise him until her machine came abreast of him. She had been unprepared for the encounter, not knowing that he was in Cape Town, and when she met his glance she flushed hotly, and losing control of her machine, swerved violently to one side. Bolitho swerved after her, but she righted herself dexterously, and smiled into his anxious face.

"I'm getting off, Teddy," she said. "Don't wait for me. I'll probably overtake you,—at any rate, I shan't be far behind. . . . Ride on, please."

He nodded, and only dimly understanding, and greatly troubled in mind, kept on his course, while Julie slowed down her machine and alighted, and waited for Lawless to come up.

"You!" she cried, and held out her hand to him in glad surprise.

He took the hand, pressed it warmly, and relieved her of the charge of the cycle—the same old well-worn cycle he had wheeled for her before.

"I didn't know you were back in town," she said, walking along beside him with flushed, glad young face and smiling eyes. "You've come—to stay?"

"For a few days only," he replied. . . . "I've spent

three of them already. I began to fear I should miss seeing you."

"Oh!" she said, and gasped with consternation at the mere thought. "I wish I'd known. . . ."

"I've been past the house a few times," he said.

"And I never saw you! . . . It was nice of you to take the trouble," she added, blushing.

"When a man counts his friends on the fingers of one hand—and then has fingers to spare," he returned, looking into her eyes with a grave smile, "he can't afford to overlook the truest of them."

"Not the truest," she contradicted quickly, her thoughts unconsciously reverting to a scene she was little likely to forget, when a woman with beautiful tear-filled eyes held in her hands a portrait of this man, and spoke of her wasted youth.

Julie turned her face away from his and looked along the sunlit road. She was wondering whether she could find the courage to tell him what she knew. It was so difficult to talk to one towards whom, perhaps on account of his reserve, she had always felt a certain shyness, of such private and intimate things.

"No!" he said quietly. — "A very true friend, then. . . . And one I value highly,—perhaps because I know that I have her regard quite independently of any merit. A man doesn't prize his fair-weather friends; it's the friends of his adversity he holds dear."

"There is someone," Julie began, and hesitated, and then gathered fresh courage and essayed again. . . . "There is someone who—if you would let her—would be the best friend you ever had. . . . I don't understand why you won't see it,—there are many things about you I fail to understand. And I'm horribly afraid I'm going to annoy you. It's so impertinent to interfere in other people's lives."

"It's an impertinence a great many people are guilty of," he returned. . . . "I don't fancy, myself, it ever does much good."

"You aren't going to be very severe with me, are you?" she pleaded.

"I'm not in the least likely to be severe with you," he answered. "But since you feel like that about it, why not leave it alone?"

"Because," Julie replied bravely, "it's the saddest thing in all the world that you shouldn't know what I do. I'm convinced you can't know. . . . You'd act differently if you knew."

"You are a little mystifying," he said, and looked at her uncertainly. "It sounds rather like a grammatical conundrum to which the key may be found in the tense. I'm not good at riddles. If you want me to understand, you'll have to take the plunge, and not stand shivering on the brink."

So Julie took the plunge, but took it after a feminine method, going in by degrees with the instinctive aversion for putting her head under water.

"I'm speaking of someone," she said, "I've grown to know and to love. . . . I think she also loves me."

"That wouldn't be very difficult," he interposed.

"Because," Julie went on, as though there had been no interruption, "she talks to me sometimes of intimate things."

He stared at her.

"You are not going to repeat her confidence to me, surely?"

"Why, no," she answered. "But—I'm trying to explain."

"You're doing it very badly," he said; and it occurred to Julie that he was anxious to prevent her explaining

more fully. But because this thing mattered to her, mattered tremendously, she persevered.

"I'm sorry for that," she said. . . . "I so want you to understand. Please try. . . . And be a little patient with me. Once she spoke to me about you. She didn't say much. But she had your photograph in her room, and when she looked at it the tears were in her eyes. And then——"

Julie broke off abruptly and searched about after words. He waited in silence. She had at least succeeded in gaining his attention. But his interest was not of an entirely agreeable order. A heavy frown contracted his brows, and the grey eyes sought the dust of the road in preference to her earnest face. There was that in the quality of the dust that was seemingly absorbing.

"She spoke of her wasted youth," the girl went on in a voice scarcely above a whisper. "I wish—oh! how I wish I could give you some idea of the sorrow in her voice,—the longing. She's proud. She tried to hide her emotion. But I know."

He turned towards her suddenly, making no pretence of misunderstanding, though she had mentioned no name, to whom she referred.

"You've allowed your love of romance to lead you astray," he said curtly. "I am a better judge than you are in this matter."

"Ah! now," she cried quickly, "I have angered you, and done harm."

"Not so," he returned. "I shall cease to think of what you have told me. You've jumped to a wrong conclusion, that's all. The friend you speak of took away her friendship from me long ago. It was her own doing. She would not thank you for your intercession."

"You are hard," she said unexpectedly. The

accusation hit him ; it was what he had recently called himself. "And you're wrong. I understand better than you do—perhaps because I'm a woman, and have suffered myself."

"You are not a woman," he said, with sudden gentleness of manner. "You are a child almost, and to children their sorrows appear disproportionately great. As for suffering! . . . Who among us can expect to escape his share? And a little suffering is not harmful. The human heart that hasn't been through the fire is inclined to be shallow. All the pleasant pools in life are shallow ; the great thoughts and the great deeds come from the deep seas."

They walked for a while in silence after his last speech. When they had covered a few yards in this manner Julie stopped and offered to take the cycle.

"Teddy will be wondering what has become of me," she said. "We are playing tennis this afternoon at Mrs. Lawless'."

He stopped also and held the machine for her.

"I should like to see you again before you go," she added.

"Every evening at about five o'clock I will pass your house," he replied.

She mounted and rode off, and Lawless, wheeling about, returned to the city, his mind, for all his assertion that he would think no more of what she had said, busy with the picture she had conjured up, a picture which in his larger knowledge of the circumstances struck him as exaggerated and unreal.

Julie overtook Bolitho round the first bend. He had dismounted and was waiting for her at the roadside.

"I told you to go on," she said, when she came up with him.

"I know," he answered. "But I preferred to wait."

She slipped from her saddle to the ground, and, seating herself beside him in the hedge, to the young man's intense embarrassment, dissolved into tears.

"Oh, don't, Julie!" he pleaded. . . . "Don't! I will go on and leave you, if you wish it, dear."

"Silly!" she sobbed. "I don't wish it. You're the best fellow I ever knew. Oh, Teddy! I'm so miserable. I've made a hash of things with the best intentions in the world. There's nobody understands me, but you. And you don't understand altogether."

"If you'll give me the cue, I'll try," he declared earnestly, leaning towards her and encircling her with his arm. "You know that I'd do anything on earth to please you. Julie, my darling! I love you so, I can't bear to see you cry."

She suddenly sat up straighter, and laughed, and dabbed at her eyes.

"I know," she said. "I know. . . . Oh, goodness! what a scarecrow I must look! And anyone might come along."

She put up her hands and rearranged her hat.

"Is it straight, Teddy?" she asked.

"Yes," he answered, and looked her steadily in the eyes.

"My dear, don't try to deceive me," he said. . . . "Better hurt my feelings now than later. . . . If it's the other fellow who wins I'll go my way."

"Stupid!" she cried, leaning her wet cheek against his shoulder. "There's someone else for the other fellow—only he won't see it."

"I can't blame him," Teddy answered, "when there's you."

She laughed again.

"There has never been me for anyone besides yourself," she said. "If I lower the prize in your eyes by

that admission I can't help it. And there's still left to you the choice of grabbing your machine out of the hedge and riding away."

Teddy Bolitho sat gravely stiff and expectant. Beneath the light banter of her manner he caught at a deeper note.

"Julie," he said nervously, "will you—— If you don't mean anything, for God's sake! don't lead me to hope falsely. . . . You know that I've loved you for years with the whole force of my nature. There's no one else for me though I live to be a hundred. I've met you. . . . That's enough. It's you or no one. I'm not much of a catch, but if you'll have me, such as I am, I'll spend my life in trying to make you happy."

"You make me happy as it is, Teddy," she answered quietly. "It is I who will need to spend my life in trying to satisfy you."

XXIII

LAWLESS' stay in Cape Town was so much longer than he had expected that he began to fear Tottie had not been so successful as her vanity had led her to suppose. He looked daily for news of her ; but she was no hand at corresponding ; until she had something definite to tell him he knew she would not write.

In the end it was not a letter but a telegram that reached him. It had been handed in at Ceres Road. Beyond this clue as to her whereabouts, the contents told him little.

"go to junction hotel kraaifontein find instructions there tottie."

He hunted up the trains. There was nothing before the morning. He packed a portmanteau in readiness, and sat down and wrote to Colonel Grey.

"DEAR SIR,—I have received my summons. Am off up the line to-morrow. Junction Hotel, Kraaifontein, will find me. I will keep you informed as to my movements.—Yours faithfully,
H. LAWLESS."

"That will keep the old boy quiet for a time," he mused, and went out and posted it himself.

On turning away from the pillar-box he came face to face with Denzil. It was the first time they had met since the memorable occasion on the veld, and it was evident from the expression on their faces that that last occasion was in the minds of both. The present encounter sprang upon them unawares. Denzil had

known that Lawless was in Cape Town, he had written to Van Bleit to inform him of the fact ; but he had not happened across him before. He would have felt infinitely happier had he not happened across him then. Doubtless he remembered Lawless' words, when, having him at a disadvantage, he had struck him with the packet of letters across the face. He fervently wished he had refrained from allowing his feelings to get the better of discretion in the hour of triumph. Plainly, that hour no longer endured. It was not inspiring to meet fully the man whom, when his hands were bound, he had struck in the face, and recall his words that one day when his hands were free he would repay the insult.

He eyed the tall figure nervously, and quickened his steps. Lawless glanced him over with a speculative eye. One blow from his fist would have knocked him down. And he was sorely tempted to strike out, to punish this miserable little cur who had dared to insult a better man than himself. But it was against his policy to endanger his liberty at that juncture ; and to punish Denzil in the open street, with people passing continually, and a policeman standing at the corner, was courting arrest. And so he allowed his man to slip past him ; but there was in the keen grey eyes as they rested upon the foe such a look of quiet prospective vengeance that, though he passed unmolested, Denzil was not greatly reassured. It was a temporary let-off, he felt.

He hurried on, and Lawless pursued his way in an opposite direction. The evening was all before him. He decided that with the uncertain promise of rest the following night held, he would turn in early and take all the sleep he could procure. He might be glad during the next few days of a reserve to fall back upon. He

returned to his hotel to dine. Against the kerb before the entrance a motor-car was stationed. It occurred to Lawless that he had seen the car before ; but it was not until he entered the hotel that he realised its being there concerned him in any way. A messenger was waiting for him in the vestibule with a note. He had been waiting some time, and seemed immeasurably relieved when Lawless came in.

"It requires an answer, sir," he said, as he presented the note.

Lawless ripped open the envelope, and withdrawing the contents, glanced his eye down the page.

"Very good," he said. "Tell Mrs. Lawless I will be with her in about an hour's time."

The messenger looked at him calculatingly.

"There's the car outside, sir. If you'd like it to wait——"

"I shouldn't," Lawless interrupted curtly.

He tipped the man and went to his room to dress. He wondered why she should wish to see him, and recalled with an unaccountable irritation what Julie Weeber had confided to him as the result of her unaided observation. He had a natural antipathy towards scenes, and he disliked above all things listening to a dissertation on his moral delinquencies.

When he had dined he hired a taxi and drove to Rondebosch. He told the driver to wait for him, and went inside the garden and up the path to the door. His visit was expected. The servant who admitted him helped him out of the light overcoat he wore to cover his dress suit, and conducted him to the drawing-room, where Mrs. Lawless waited to receive him, pacing restlessly up and down, up and down, her face white even in the warm glow of the lights, and her eyes darkly luminous in their pale setting.

She came to a halt when she heard his step in the hall, and took up a book as though she would appear to occupy herself, but put it down again with instinctive dislike towards posing. His step came nearer, she put out a hand and grasped the back of a chair, gripping it tightly, her nervousness painfully apparent in the trembling of her lips.

And then the door opened. . . .

A sudden calm overspread her features at sight of him, her stiffened attitude relaxed. The hand that had gripped the chair back rested upon it easily; the other, that hung clenched at her side, fell loosely open. It seemed as though the appearance of this man for whom she had waited in a state of great nervous excitement quieted her agitation, as though his ready response to the summons that conflicting emotions had dictated and held her back from sending before, brought relief. It was a very composed and dignified woman that confronted Lawless' gaze, a woman gowned simply in black, which suited her brilliant beauty, with a single deep red rose at her breast where the slight opening revealed the slender throat.

He advanced into the room and stood quite close to her, looking steadily into the dark glowing eyes.

"I don't know whether this prompt response to your note is inconvenient," he said. "But it was now or not at all. Had you left it until to-morrow you would have missed me."

"You are leaving Cape Town again?" she asked. . .

"When?"

"To-morrow morning."

"And where do you go?"

"Up the line," he answered. . . . "Not very far."

She flushed quickly. Some instinct told her that he was going to rejoin the companion in whose society

he had left Cape Town before. A chilled look came into her eyes. It seemed that whenever she held out a hand across the distances that separated them a great wall of his making rose between them to divide them more certainly than before. And he invariably made her aware of this wall at the very outset, so that her every effort during the difficult interviews between them was but an ineffectual hurling of herself against this impassable barrier. She moved from behind the chair and seated herself.

"I'm sorry," she said simply. "Won't you sit down?" He accepted the invitation, and leaning back surveyed her with a thoughtful interest that was critical rather than admiring, and intensely curious. She had some purpose in sending for him, he supposed. He wondered, with a slight impatience, why she distressed herself so unnecessarily. They had come long ago to the parting of the ways,—it was a mistake to go out of one's road in order that the paths should recross merely to separate again.

"I had no idea you would be leaving—so soon," she said. "I wasn't aware you were in Cape Town until I passed you that morning in the car."

"I had only just got back," he explained.

"Afterwards I was sorry—that I didn't stop," she went on slowly, labouring somewhat over the sentences. "But—I was surprised. And I felt a little diffident about asking you to come out. . . . I knew you would come, of course. . . . That's why, perhaps."

"My only wonder is that you take the trouble," he returned. "Plainly, you don't get any joy of it. . . . And hasn't it ever occurred to you that it's painful for me as well? My life hasn't been wholly without regrets. You remind me of the old Inquisitorial system—continually stretching a man on the rack for some imaginary

good purpose. And you rack yourself in the process. . . . Where's the sense in it, anyway ? ”

“ I have thought,” she said,—“ I have tried——”

She got up abruptly from her seat and turned her back on him and walked slowly down the long room, and stood by the fireplace with her elbow on the mantel and her face dropped on her hand. He remained seated where he was, and leaning forward, his hands between his knees, watched her with interest. She made a curiously striking and graceful picture, standing there with her half-averted face, the warm lamp-light falling on her black-robed figure. There was a restrained yet dramatic appeal in her attitude that touched him, and in the long drooping line of neck and shoulder as it was turned towards him was a suggestion of weakness that commended itself to his masculine mind. She looked lonely, and sad, he considered.

“ I know what you thought,” he said. “ I know what you tried to do. It was praiseworthy in many respects. . . . But it was too late. If you would fashion the clay into a goodly shape you should hasten to do so while it is pliable. When once it is set you can only break it.”

“ You always make me feel,” she said, without changing her position, “ that I am directly responsible for the waste of your life.”

“ I don't admit that my life stands for waste,” he replied coldly.

She lifted her face, and turning it slightly looked steadily in his direction.

“ Perhaps,” she said, “ I am not qualified to judge. I only judge from what I see—from what I know you might have done if only you had willed it. And now——” She looked away from him, and once more dropped her face upon her hand.

"Hugh," she said, and her voice was so low as to be scarcely louder than a whisper, "I asked you to come here to-night, because I felt that there was much in the past on my side that needed your forgiveness. I was hard. . . . I see that now. . . . When you wanted sympathy I failed you. And things happened to separate us. Perhaps it was less your fault than I imagined. But—there are certain things a woman finds it difficult to pardon."

"I have never blamed you," he interposed harshly.

He too got up, but he did not follow her. He stood leaning against one of the windows with his back to the outer air.

"I have blamed myself," she answered gently,—
"often."

"You would," he said. "You're made like that. You'd bow your back to any burden you believed it to be your duty to bear. But you needn't imagine it your especial mission to undertake any burden on my account. I wish from the bottom of my soul you could bring yourself to forget my existence."

"I can't do that," she answered. . . . "I don't want to."

She moved from her position and came to a standstill in front of him with her hands locked together in an attitude that was like a supplication in the nervous entwining of her fingers.

"I want you to lead a life more worthy of yourself," she said . . . "worthier of the man I knew and loved. Oh, my dear! if you only knew how all these years you have been steadily breaking my heart. . . . I can't bear it. . . . I can't bear it, that you should lead the life you are leading. . . . You are going back to that woman to-morrow. . . . I know it. Give her up, Hugh,—and this life of adventure,—for my sake—

because I ask it. Don't go to-morrow. I hate the thought of your going. . . . Stay here."

"Impossible," he answered with quiet decision. "I am pledged. I must go. I have no choice in the matter."

Her hands fell apart. She made a quick, almost a despairing gesture.

"And do I count for nothing in your life?" she asked passionately. "You loved me once . . . in the years that are past—when you were younger. And I was young too—a girl. Ah! life, life! How full of promise it seems, and how each successive year fades and dims that promise! You were a king among men to me then. . . . And now—you lead the life of a common adventurer, following reckless and dangerous enterprises, and enjoying your idle moments after the manner of a loose liver. Oh! my God! need this thing be? . . . Why will you wantonly subjugate all that is fine in your nature? It was those finer qualities in you that I loved, and you are deliberately killing them."

Lawless had drawn himself instinctively straighter under the shower of words. He looked at her with hard, unresponsive eyes.

"I have no use for that kind of love," he said coldly. "It is of no human value. To love the imaginary saint in a man is not going to help the man when you make the inevitable discovery that the saint isn't there. If love is to be of any use it must be for the sinner as well."

He went nearer to her, and laughed harshly when he observed how she drew back involuntarily from his advance.

"When you can bring yourself," he said, "to suffer my touch without flinching; when you can feel glad

for my lips to rest upon yours without consideration for where last they may have rested; when you can love me for myself—as I am—as you know me, a common adventurer, a profligate, then we may wipe out the intervening years . . . not before.”

She was silent for a while after he had finished; and he knew that she was considering what he had uttered with such brutal frankness, weighing it in her mind.

Presently she said, moistening her dry lips before speaking:

“Will you promise not to go to-morrow? . . . to break with the old life finally? . . .”

“Bargain for bargain,” he returned cynically. “You can’t give freely, you see.”

His face hardened, became more resolute.

“I can’t do what you ask. . . . It is out of the question. I am pledged irrevocably—promised. I can’t draw back.”

She moved away with a gesture of bitterness, and with her back towards him, stood, a reluctant tragic figure, with one hand on the back of the chair where she had stood when he entered.

“It is always the same,” she whispered. . . . “Always the same. Your desires—the desire of the moment, first. I don’t believe you ever loved me, though at one time you professed so much.”

“At least, I did not love an ideal,” he answered. “I loved the flesh and blood that is you.”

She turned her head slowly and looked at him.

“That is it,” she answered bitterly. . . . “The flesh and blood! . . . The fairness of the flesh. . . . All that the flesh means you care for.”

“Oh! I’m materialistic,” he admitted. “I’ve no fancy for falling in love with a dream.”

He followed her, and took up his position again close

to her, with his hands behind him, looking steadily into her eyes.

"Until I met you," he said, "I never realised how closely allied vice and virtue are. You are so very virtuous that to knock up against your purity flings a man back on himself and inclines him to the other extreme. I've always looked on intolerance as a vice. . . . You are intolerant—most good people are. If only intolerance realised the amount of evil it is directly responsible for! But you'll wonder at my impertinence in preaching to you. . . . Indeed, I wonder at myself."

"Go on," she said hoarsely. "Perhaps—when you are gone—I shall remember."

"Good Lord!" he cried. "I don't want you to remember. Put me out of your thoughts altogether."

"Ah! if we could command our thoughts," she said.

His face suddenly lost its hard look, a kinder light came into the keen eyes. For a brief moment he rested a hand on the chair-back beside hers, then, recollecting, as suddenly removed it.

"When I go out of this room to-night," he said, "I go out of your life finally. If you send for me again, I shall not obey the summons. God knows, I have injured you enough. . . . The least that I can do is to help you to forget. This raking among the ashes is unprofitable. You can't step down from your pedestal. I can't stand with you on the heights. We look at life from different points of view, at different elevations. You see things from a height that obscures your perspective; I look upon life from a lower level, and behold its naked realities. What seems to me natural, you would regard as gross. It is one of the essential differences—only exaggerated—between man and woman. I can't see the use in reviving through these unsatis-

factory meetings all the stresses we lived through in the past. . . . I'll keep out of Cape Town as much as possible, and when my job here is ended I'll leave the country."

"There is no need for that," she replied in so low a voice that he only just heard what she said. "I came out because I knew you were out here. I wanted to see you. Now that I have seen you I shall go Home."

She looked at him quite calmly and held out her hand.

"Good-bye," she said, that was all.

He felt grateful to her after he had left that she had spared him a more emotional scene. Could he have looked back into the room when he was speeding towards Cape Town he would have known that the emotion had merely been held in check.

XXIV

LAWLESS reached Kraaifontein to find that there was neither word from nor sign of Tottie. No person answering Tottie's description had been seen in the neighbourhood recently.

He engaged a room at the hotel and prepared to wait. Plainly, Tottie had not found Van Bleit come to heel as readily as she had supposed. He found the waiting extraordinarily dull. There was nothing for it but to tramp over the veld between meals. That, the eating of the meals, and sleeping, were the sole means of enjoyment provided by the neighbourhood, so far as he could judge. The sleeping, in Lawless' opinion, was the most amusing of these recreations. During meals he was bored almost beyond endurance by the schoolmaster for the district, who had his lodging there; and the tramping, with no object beyond the exercise, proved a poor pastime.

"It is good to meet a man of education in a place like this," the schoolmaster observed on the first day. "Are you making any length of stay, may I inquire?"

"God forbid!" Lawless ejaculated.

The other smiled a trifle deprecatingly.

"We have not much to offer—no," he admitted thoughtfully. "But if you are here for a few days I can show you some good walks, and introduce you to one or two nice families—quite nice, where you will be well received."

"Your quite nice families may not be so glad of my acquaintance as you imagine," Lawless answered.

"With my recommendation that will be all right," the other said.

"What the devil do you know about me," Lawless demanded, "that you offer me a passport to the houses of your friends? My good sir, you should be more discreet in the matter of your introductions."

The schoolmaster, who had taken a liking to the new-comer, looked hurt.

"I don't know anything about you," he replied. "But during a fairly long and varied life I have learnt to trust my judgment of men."

Lawless suddenly smiled.

"And you judge a man as you find him," he said, "without looking beneath the surface? You countenance him, even to introducing him to your friends . . . *quam diu se bene gesserit*."

"What more is necessary?" inquired the schoolmaster promptly.

"True!" acquiesced Lawless. "If a man have seven devils what need their possession matter to anyone save himself so long as he keep them out of sight?"

On the second day after his arrival the letter of instructions reached him. It bore the Wellington postmark. Tottie was gradually working her way down the line. It was a scrawling, lengthy epistle, containing many interlineations and corrections and succinct marginal notes. Lawless carried it to the garden, and sat on a bench under a huge eucalyptus tree while he deciphered the contents. Properly adjusted, and omitting the evil spelling, it read:

DEAR OLD GRIT,—I know you'll be chafing horribly at the delay; but there have been difficulties, and it was no use ringing

up the curtain on this act before we had got things thoroughly in order, and every man knowing the part he has to play. Poor old Karl is under the delusion he is to play hero to my heroine. I have him properly in tow. He tumbled to his part beautifully at our first accidental encounter. He pursued, and I eluded. I got him as far as Ceres Road in this manner. Then one evening in the dusk I met and had a talk with him. . . . Such a talk ! . . . He kissed me. . . . He kept on kissing me—keep your hair on, Grit. I told him I was afraid of you,—that I'd bolted from you, and were scared to death you'd find me out. I said you were mad to get me back, but I wasn't taking any. He offered to take me under his protection. I declined, but with less firmness than virtue should have displayed. He fancied I only needed pressing. I told him my idea was to get back to Cape Town and take the first boat up the coast, only I was scared of happening across you. And then he said some fine brave manly things that made one feel your life wasn't worth an hour's purchase. Bombastic fool ! Always crowing and flapping his wings when he gets among the hens. . . .

I let him talk. The next day I left Ceres Road and came on here. Of course he turned up almost immediately. We met again in the dusk and had another talk. Karl's a hot one. . . . The difficulty I have to keep him at arm's length ! . . . I gave in to his pleading after a decent show of reluctance. . . . He fancies I was only holding out for personal gain. We are going to a little place across the river about ten miles from Kraaifontein. It's known as Jager's Rest. By the time you get this we shall be on our road thither in a Cape cart. I've arranged with the nigger what route he drives, so if you follow my instructions all will be well ; if you fail me now, devil knows what will happen.

I enclose a map I've drawn of the route. Just half-way between here and Kraaifontein—see my mark on the map—you'll take your stand, and wait for us to pass somewhere about noon. There's cover there, and one can play highwayman without risk. If I can get hold of Karl's revolver I'll spoil it for him, if I can't I'll hamper him in more feminine mode. In any case, I am not afraid you won't be equal to him. If you murder him, I'll stop and help you bury him. TOTTIE.

Lawless folded the letter, and carefully examined the map. Then he folded that also, put both in his pocket,

and went in to breakfast. The schoolmaster, who had all but finished his meal, looked up to nod.

"You are indefatigable," he said. "You have been exercising before breakfast?"

"Only loafing in the garden," Lawless answered as he sat down.

"Yes." The other glanced wistfully at the undisturbed end of the table, and then out through the window at the brilliant sunshine. "I'd been counting on your company this morning," he said. "But of course now." . . . He looked keenly disappointed. "It's going to be a hot day," he remarked.

"Looks like it."

Lawless unfolded his napkin and began on the eggs and bacon which the coloured boy placed before him. In his preoccupation he was scarcely conscious of the presence of the other man, save when he spoke, and then it was to feel a slight irritation at the inconsequent remarks that called for attention and response.

"Perhaps to-morrow," the little insignificant shabby man proceeded tentatively, "you might feel inclined to accompany me. It's a pleasant walk, and——"

Lawless looked up suddenly.

"To-morrow, I am returning to the coast," he said.

"So soon!"

The speaker's increased disappointment was too marked to pass unnoticed. Lawless looked at him in some surprise, and was rather ashamed of himself because he found the little man such a bore.

"It may seem soon to you," he said. "You see, you lead a useful life; but when a man has nothing to occupy his time he quickly tires of a place like this. I never intended to stay more than a day or two."

"I shall miss your company," the other said, and rising from the table, lingered for a few moments with

his hand upon it. "I suppose the place has not many attractions for visitors. For those who live here it is different. I drifted here. I scarcely know how. I began at Port Nolleth, but the west coast fever drove me inland. This little place suits me, and I suit it. We're neither go-ahead."

He smiled at his mild joke, but without mirth. His lonely life appeared lonelier contrasted with the break which the vigorous personality of this chance acquaintance had made in the monotony of his days. He had never met anyone whose going he so much regretted.

"Well, I won't interrupt you at your breakfast any longer," he said apologetically. "I must be starting. We shall meet this evening."

"We'll have our walk to-morrow, if it's agreeable to you," Lawless returned, and wondered at himself for being such a fool, yet was not ill-pleased with his folly when he caught the eager look that shone in the mild eyes behind the spectacles.

"Awful bore, old Burton," he mused, looking through the window after the shabby figure as it disappeared in the sunshine. "But I'm damned if he isn't rather a fine simple soul, after that!"

When he had finished his breakfast he went out to see about a horse to ride. There was a mare in the stable which, according to the proprietor, could go like the wind. Appearance is not everything to judge by in the matter of a horse's paces. The animal in question looked languid, Lawless considered; but that alone could not disprove her reputation as a racer. He ordered the mare to be saddled, and went indoors to examine his revolver and make certain preparations for the encounter with Van Bleit. He had very vividly in his mind the last encounter in which he had been so cunningly outwitted. He meant to settle that score,

which, like a debt of honour, weighed upon his mind.

When he was ready he went to the stables, and, having made full inquiries as to the direction of Jager's Rest, rode off, a feeling of exhilaration swaying him as he felt the wind in his teeth, and listened to the rhythm of his horse's hoofs thudding over the veld. After his compulsory inactivity the present adventure was particularly welcome. From choice he would have preferred to face Van Bleit with the odds equal; but in the circumstances, with all there was at stake, it had ceased to be a personal matter, it was a matter calling for the utmost discretion.

When he arrived at the place marked for him by Tottie on the map, which, following her directions, he found without difficulty, he dismounted, and, being ahead of time, hobbled his horse and allowed it to graze while he enjoyed a pipe, lying full length on the veld with his eye fixed attentively along the line of route the Cape cart would travel, according to the information in his letter. In many respects the lie of the land reminded him of the spot where Van Bleit had so cleverly tricked him. The open, undulating stretch of veld, save that it was more thickly overgrown with scrub, was much the same, it presented the same wide desolate appearance; and in place of the dense bush was a belt of wattles,—the cover Tottie had mentioned, where a horseman could conceal himself without fear of detection. Lawless approved the choice of ground. Tottie had evidently been over the route and arranged it all beforehand. So far everything had been contrived with the greatest forethought and discretion.

He rose after a while, and pocketing his pipe, whistled to the mare, which, feeding on the veld some yards distant, lifted her head at the sound, and moved farther away. Lawless followed her, and untying the rein

with which he had hobbled her, patted her lean sides encouragingly. She had carried him well, thus disproving her appearance, and verifying to some extent her reputation.

He led her into the shade of the trees, and standing with his shoulders resting against one of the trunks waited with the rein over his arm, peering between the interlacing branches for a sign of the cart. It was late. Tottie had mentioned noon. He looked at his watch. It was after the half-hour.

And then, far off, he saw it coming.

He remained quite still, not a muscle of his tense face relaxed, only into the grey eyes there leapt a sudden flash of stern, fierce joy.

The cart came on at a fair pace. It was drawn by two horses with a coloured man driving. In the back seat, under the hood, were the figures of a man and woman.

While it was still some distance off Lawless mounted, and keeping well under cover of the trees, rode his horse as near to the opening as he considered safe, and sat motionless in the saddle, waiting. A shaft of sunlight that pierced its way between the branches glinted brightly on the barrel of a revolver which was gripped in his right hand.

The cart drew nearer. The sound of the wheels was audible,—nearer still. Lawless could hear distinctly Tottie's deep, rather vulgar laugh. She was talking incessantly in a high-pitched, unnatural voice that suggested a nervous desire to distract her companion's attention. When they drew parallel with the belt of trees, Lawless observed her call Van Bleit to look at something on the other side of the cart, something which was plainly not there, and which therefore Van Bleit, following her pointing finger with every desire in the world to oblige her, failed utterly to see. What he did

see the next minute, bringing his head round with a jerk at the unexpected sound of a horse's hoofs, was the barrel of Lawless' revolver unpleasantly close to his head.

"Hands up!" cried Lawless. "Or, by Jove! you're a dead man."

Tottie shrieked, and flung her arms around Van Bleit with a grip the strength of which considerably surprised him. He was quite convinced in his own mind that if she had not hampered him he could have defended himself. He swore at her. Then, his eye on the revolver, he nodded sulkily.

"All right!" he said. "You score this round."

Lawless spoke to the driver, who, staring at the shining weapon in the stranger's hand with distended eyes and fallen jaw, reluctantly pulled in his horses and brought the cart to a standstill.

"You'll oblige me," he then said to his discomfited foe in a voice like the click of steel, "by getting out of the cart. I have business with you."

Van Bleit obeyed with an alacrity he did not often display. He recognised the seriousness of his case, but, unaware of Tottie's treachery, hoped rather forlornly that with her aid he might yet contrive some device whereby to get even with his assailant. It was a bold game for a man to play, to hold up three persons, and one of them armed.

Tottie alighted after him. After the first shriek she had subsided into an extraordinary calm, and all that could be seen of her face through the thick blue veil gave no indication of alarm. She was indeed broadly smiling. She sidled up to Van Bleit and slipped a hand into his pocket. For the moment he imagined she was playing his game for him, the next he was quick to suspect she was not, and his hand came down spontaneously and grasped her wrist. At the same time

he felt something cold against his temple, and instantly perceived she held a revolver in her other hand.

"I don't want to shoot you," Lawless said curtly ; "but if you don't put your hands up I shall be forced to."

Van Bleit's hands went up again, and he coughed and spat in disgust. He realised fully now that he had been tricked. It was apparent to the meanest intelligence that Lawless and the woman were acting in concert.

The woman took his weapon from him and flung it out of reach. Then an extraordinary thing happened. It was the most humiliating and the most astounding moment in his life. The woman put up a hand to her hat and dragged at it so that it seemed to him she was pulling, not only her hat, but her head with it. And then the hat with its crown of roses and its big blue veil, and the wonderful golden hair, which Van Bleit had believed to be dyed but had never suspected of being a wig, hit him in the face, and so fell at his feet ; and he stood with his upraised arms, his face purple with rage, staring into a painted, grinning, vaguely familiar countenance which, with its short fair hair, and prominent ears that the golden curls had hidden, he guessed at rather than recognised for Tom Hayhurst's.

"There's a lock of my hair for remembrance, dear boy," said Tottie.

XXV

THE amazement of Van Bleit was equalled by that of the Kaffir driver. He nearly tumbled out of his seat in his astonishment; but the child that is in the African was more tickled than anything else at this rapid change of sex. He chuckled audibly, and uttered a succession of rapid clicks in expression of his appreciation. With the cunning of his race he quickly perceived which was the winning side, and decided forthwith that if a choice had to be made he would submit himself to the orders of the new baas, and the baas-missis. The native does not willingly risk his skin or his ultimate chance of reward. Having arrived at this decision he settled himself comfortably in his seat, and with the reins held loosely in his hands, prepared to watch developments. If there was to be murder done, which he firmly believed, he was going to see it.

The same belief was in the mind of Van Bleit. He looked into the hard cold face of the man on horseback, and recalled with very real regret how he had slashed that same thin, scarred face with his whip when he had the man at his mercy. With still greater regret he remembered how he had refrained from shooting him on that occasion. If he had only killed him then he would not be in this mess.

He blinked stupidly, and dropped his eyes, and fell to thinking. There was no way out. He was fairly trapped, and that by two men who owed him each a very considerable grudge. He thought of Tom Hayhurst's broken head. It was easily seen where the blow

had fallen by the deeper shade of the new hair that had grown over the place. Then later thoughts of Tom Hayhurst in connection with his disguise obtruded themselves, and again the angry purple showed in his greying face.

"Did you bring a length of rope, Grit?" he heard a voice inquire, and started involuntarily at the unfamiliar sound. It was the voice of Hayhurst, no longer high-pitched in the affected drawl that was assumed and discarded with the wonderful golden wig, but the sharp clear tones of the young engineer as he had heard them in Cape Town.

There was no verbal answer, but the man addressed took a short coil of rope from his coat pocket and threw it to the speaker. Hayhurst caught it and approached Van Bleit.

"Now, darling," he said, in the accents that were Tottie's, "put your hands behind you."

Van Bleit complied because he dared not refuse.

"I'd like," he said, and his hands wavered till the click of Lawless' revolver set at half-cock reluctantly compelled him to bring them into the required position, "to throttle you."

Hayhurst laughed.

"I don't doubt it," he answered.

Not being particularly soft-hearted, and having in mind, besides his own injuries, those raw wrists of Lawless' which he had unbound in the early morning by the obscure light in the Kaffir hut, he drew the rope tightly about Van Bleit's thick wrists and fastened it securely with a vindictive satisfaction in the knowledge of the discomfort he caused.

"You ought to feel flattered," he said, "that we admired your methods sufficiently to copy them."

He stepped from behind and stood in front of him, jeering.

"Wouldn't you like to kiss me? . . . It may be your last opportunity."

Van Bleit's ashen face turned brick red, and from red changed again slowly to the dirty grey colour that told of the terror that possessed him. He did not answer, but he spat at his tormentor in his rage.

Lawless dismounted and hitched the rein of his horse to a limb of a tree. He pocketed his weapon, and approached Van Bleit, who, expecting a personal attack, fell back hurriedly before his advance.

"Stand still," he commanded. And Van Bleit obeyed.

"What are you up to?" he asked nervously. . . .
"You're remembering things against me. You've got a grudge—both of you. Well, just you remember that I might have murdered you that morning—without risk . . . and I didn't."

"I'm remembering," Lawless answered, "everything."

He turned to Hayhurst.

"Change your rig, Tom," he said quietly. "And clean your face, if you can. I may need you presently."

And to the huge delight of the Kaffir, and the further mortification of Van Bleit, Hayhurst proceeded in a business-like manner, with an occasional lapse into fooling, to divest himself of pointed shoes, skirt and blouse, corsets and artificial bust, until with an exaggerated sigh of relief he stood in his pants and shirt and stretched himself luxuriously.

"No, I wouldn't be a woman," he remarked,— "not even a successful woman. . . . And I've enjoyed a fair amount of popularity in the rôle."

While he went to the cart for the portmanteau of male attire he had brought with him, Lawless occupied himself in going through the contents of Van Bleit's pockets, who, while asserting with a contemptuous

laugh that there was nothing there of the least value to anyone beside himself, seemed none the less uneasy at being searched.

"I suppose you don't believe me," he said sneeringly, "when I say that I don't carry that packet you want about with me?"

"Oh! I believe you," Lawless answered, calmly continuing the search. "I've a great faith in your veracity."

He came upon Van Bleit's pocket-book, and withdrew a few paces to examine the contents at his leisure. He had a strong idea that if Van Bleit carried what he was looking for, he would find it somewhere between the closely packed covers. Van Bleit watched him with hardly controlled anxiety.

"I don't see what concern you have with my private papers," he remarked bitterly.

"Your vision will be clearer if I happen across what I want," Lawless replied. "If I don't it will be so much the worse for you."

He went through the contents carefully while Van Bleit looked on in almost painful interest, and Tom Hayhurst, having changed into a light-coloured suit, proceeded to remove by the aid of much grease the bloom of a complexion that had helped to Van Bleit's undoing. The grinning native held a looking-glass for him, which Hayhurst carried with his make-up box. He had studied the art of making-up from a professional for the innocent purpose of amateur theatricals at which he was remarkably clever. He had acquired his knowledge of the manners and appearance of the demi-mondaine also at first hand, and had conceived the idea of turning his knowledge to practical account as a means of retrieving his former failure and avenging his broken head.

As he stood in the brilliant sunshine in his shirt sleeves and removed the extraordinary quantity of

grease paint with a soft rag, he felt satisfied that he had played a difficult part, and played it exceedingly well. Anyone but a genius might have overplayed the part and given the thing away. The finish of the game was in Grit's hands.

He had an immense admiration for Lawless. It had been aroused in the first instance by the tales Simmonds had told Colonel Grey of the man with the scar and the queer nickname and the reputation for courage. Other accounts he had heard later had fostered it, and his subsequent personal knowledge of the man had led to a hero-worship which, being shy of showing affection for his own sex, he contrived fairly successfully to hide. But it was sufficiently real to allow him to contemplate without envy Lawless' final success in the matter of the letters. He was satisfied that the credit of the affair should be his. Moreover, he was curiously anxious that Colonel Grey should be forced to acknowledge the integrity of the man whose trustworthiness he seemed to doubt.

He was in the act of removing the last traces of make-up from his eyebrows when a sudden exclamation from Lawless caused him to look up from his occupation.

"Got the letters?" he asked.

Lawless stood with a slip of paper in his hand. The pocket-book and its further contents lay on the veld at his feet.

"Yes," he answered briefly.

Hayhurst whistled. Then he stared at the slip of paper in the other's possession.

"Clue to 'em, I suppose?" he said, a trifle disappointedly.

"Hurry up, Tom, and finish. I want you," Lawless returned, without vouchsafing any explanation.

Van Bleit looked at the slip of paper, and scowled darkly.

"That's no use to you," he said, with an attempt at bluff. "If you hand in that receipt they won't give you the packet."

"I know all about that," Lawless answered, and smiled quietly. "Ever since you put it into my mind to guess where those letters were I've been waiting to get hold of this. Are you ready, Tom?"

He ran his eye over the metamorphosed figure, as Hayhurst, having removed the last of the paint, came forward in response to his inquiry, and the smile on his face deepened.

"By Jove!" he said.

Hayhurst laughed.

"Old Karl don't seem to like me nearly so well," he complained, grinning at Van Bleit's scowling visage. "Don't seem to want to tickle my ribs now? . . . Well, baas, what's my job?"

"Get round to the left side and keep him covered while I free his hands. He's going to do a little writing, and if he attempts any tricks you have my orders to fire."

"You don't try that game. I'll see you to hell first," Van Bleit shouted.

"You'll find yourself in hell very shortly, if you give trouble," Lawless answered grimly, as he proceeded to undo the ropes that bound his captive's arms.

Van Bleit looked green.

"You daren't do it," he stammered. . . . "There's the nigger for a witness."

"I'll risk that. Besides, there's such a thing as sending the nigger out of it . . . and the boy too."

"Not much, Grit," Hayhurst interposed, with his glance on Van Bleit and his finger on the trigger. "If there's going to be any fun I'm in at the finish."

Van Bleit gritted his teeth, and finding his hands free, looked eagerly round for a means of escape. There was

none. Unarmed, he was helpless against these two. The horse, hitched to the tree, was too far away to reach, the cart was not much nearer. Before he could reach either Hayhurst would shoot him down. And if he missed, Lawless was armed and could not fail to hit him. He was like a rat in a trap in sight of the water in which he was to drown. A cold sweat broke out on his brow. Life was very sweet. . . . And the letters ! . . . The loss of the letters would be almost as great a disaster as the loss of life.

"It's not a bit of use," he muttered, as Lawless produced a fountain pen and held it out to him ; "the Bank won't hand the packet over to anyone but myself, even if he tender the receipt."

"Don't you exercise your mind as to what the Bank will or will not do," Lawless remarked. "What you have to think about is to obey orders. You'd better concentrate all your attention on that."

Van Bleit took the pen.

"You can't make me sign," he said.

"I can't make you—no. But it amounts to this, if you refuse I send that nigger out of earshot and shoot you where you stand. . . . And mind this, if you attempt any tricks the threat holds good. I know your signature. If you don't write it fair and square on this you're a dead man. You know me, Karl Van Bleit. I don't suppose you've any reason to imagine I shall go back on my word."

He held the Bank's receipt for the safe deposit of the sealed packet of letters on the back of a notebook which he took from his pocket, keeping his hands upon it, and holding it firmly against his chest for Van Bleit's greater convenience in writing. Van Bleit hesitated. Only the knowledge that Tom Hayhurst's revolver would go off as an inevitable consequence prevented him having a struggle for the paper.

"My patience is not inexhaustible. I give you one minute," Lawless said.

The Dutchman started, raised his pen hand nervously, and again drew back. This was slow torture.

"I'll sell to you. . . . Give me a sum down," he muttered, thinking vainly of the handsome sum he had several times refused. "They won't part with the packet in exchange for this. . . . But I'll sell it to you—for a sum down."

Hayhurst chuckled.

"Don't know when you're beaten, do you, old man?"

"Write," was all Lawless vouchsafed. . . . "Here, the discharge across the back."

Van Bleit obeyed. He flung down the pen when he had finished with an oath.

"I hope you are satisfied now," he remarked with great bitterness, as Lawless carefully placed the receipt in an envelope and slipped it inside his coat.

"Not quite," he answered. He stooped for the pen and handed it again to Van Bleit. "We are not through yet. You have played your game of bluff very well, but you know perfectly that I could not get that packet from the Bank even with your receipt without a letter of authority from you."

Van Bleit completely lost his temper. This man knew too much. It was almost like parting with his life's blood, this plundering him of his treasure.

"Damn you!" he spluttered. "Damn you! May my hand rot off before it writes any such letter for you!"

Lawless took an envelope and paper from his pocket, and calmly placed and held in position the envelope on the improvised writing-pad.

"Now," he said, presenting it as he had the official receipt, "you will please address this to the Manager."

"That I never will," Van Bleit blustered. "S'elp me, I never will."

"Tom," said Lawless in a voice of deadly quiet, "when I give the word, don't hesitate to fire."

"Right-ho!" Hayhurst answered cheerfully. "My only fear is that this weapon of mine is so eager it may go off on its own account."

Lawless looked Van Bleit steadily in the eyes.

"I want you to understand," he said, "that I am in earnest when I say that it is your life against these letters. Personally, I would quite as soon it were your life. The letters are nothing to me; but they are of considerable importance to other people. . . . I doubt, on the whole, whether I should not be doing them and society at large a greater service by putting an end to you. I don't intend wasting my time in persuasion. Either you write as I direct, or I put a bullet through your heart."

In his chagrin and utter helplessness Van Bleit began to whimper.

"What have I ever done to you," he asked, "that you should hunt me down as you have? It's all spite—and jealousy. I'd like to kill you. . . . I will kill you for this. My turn will come."

He took out his handkerchief and wiped the tears from his eyes impatiently.

"If you'd only be reasonable," he said, "and come to terms. . . ."

"I've stated my terms," Lawless interrupted drily. "Count ten, Tom; then if he doesn't write, blaze away."

Hayhurst began to count audibly and fairly rapidly. When he reached eight Van Bleit with the tears in his eyes put his pen to the envelope and hurriedly directed it. Lawless examined it, put it away as he had the receipt, and spread, and held, the sheet of notepaper. There was a hard look of satisfaction in his eyes as he fastened them on Van Bleit's livid convulsed face. The

knowledge of the exquisite torture he was inflicting gave him the peculiar pleasure that a man experiences when he is wiping out an injury.

"Write briefly," he said, "to the Manager to the effect that you will be obliged if he will hand over to the bearer of this letter, Tom Hayhurst, the packet you deposited for safe keeping in the Bank, for which you enclose your receipt."

With a hand that shook Van Bleit obeyed. But half-way through he hesitated, and, with his shaking hand upraised, looked savagely at Lawless.

"Count ten, Tom."

The steely tones rang out commandingly, and had scarcely ceased when Hayhurst in audible response started his rapid counting. Van Bleit finished the letter in desperate haste, and signed it. Then with a bitter imprecation he snapped the pen between his hands and flung the broken pieces violently in Lawless' face.

"Have you done with me now?" he demanded.

"Not quite."

The reply was unexpected. Van Bleit paused irresolute, and stared with fallen countenance at this man who, not content with robbing him, demanded more. He began to fear that having tricked him out of the letters he would now foully murder him. The knowledge that, if so, he would in all probability hang for the crime was neither reassuring nor consoling.

Lawless read the letter, folded it, and placed it in his breast-pocket. Then he looked up and met Van Bleit's eye.

"What are you after?" Van Bleit asked dully.

"You've got what you wanted. . . . You let me go."

The man he addressed smiled quietly, and taking his revolver from his pocket, covered the speaker with it.

"You don't take me for quite such a fool, I hope?"

he said. "All right, Tom! You're off guard now. Just tie his hands again. I shan't want him to use them further in my service."

Van Bleit swung round as Hayhurst approached him, prepared to offer resistance.

"No, no!" he cried quickly. "I know what you're after. . . . None of that—no!"

"It's not worth your while to resist," Lawless returned curtly. "It's hands behind or a bullet in your leg. I'm not particular which."

Van Bleit faced round again and stared at him helplessly.

"You b-bully!" he stammered.

But he submitted quietly while Tom Hayhurst secured his wrists as before. And then he gazed about him with his trapped-rat expression, his full cheeks flabby and grey, and his thick lip fallen, showing the big white teeth. He was terribly afraid that his ease-taking, pleasure-loving body was about to suffer hurt. If they did not purpose murdering him, Grit Lawless would wreak his vengeance in some violent manner for the lashing he had received at his hands.

Lawless put the receipt with the letter inside the envelope which, taking Van Bleit's seal ring off his finger, and some wax and matches from his own pocket, he proceeded to seal.

"You see, I came prepared," he said.

Van Bleit scowled, but answered nothing. He was now principally concerned for his personal safety. If he could escape in time to wire to Denzil before the Bank opened in the morning, there was still a chance of saving the letters, even if Denzil had to pay for it with a couple of months for assault. Telegraphing to the Bank to stop the delivery of the packet was, he felt, useless.

Lawless gave the letter into Hayhurst's charge.

"Take the horse, Tom," he said. "I've a fancy for keeping the nigger in sight. We're not running any risks this trip. Tell 'em at the hotel that I'm spending the night with a friend, and will be back for breakfast in the morning. You're in plenty of time for the train. Get to the Bank as soon as it opens, and when you receive the packet take it to Colonel Grey, and deliver it into his hands."

"And you?" Hayhurst asked, eager to undertake the mission; yet firmly convinced that the final delivery of the letters to the Colonel was a privilege that by rights should be Lawless'.

"I'm entertaining Van Bleit," Lawless replied.

Tom Hayhurst glanced in the direction of their prisoner, and from him towards the cart where the whip stood invitingly in the socket, suggesting thoughts of retribution pleasing to dwell upon.

"I'd like to see you mark his face before I go," he said. He pointed to the whip. "Shall I fetch it?" he asked.

"You fetch your mount and clear out," Lawless answered. "When I horsewhip a man I don't do it with his hands tied."

Hayhurst gave the speaker a quick look. Then he walked towards the tree where the horse was fastened, unhitched it, and sprang into the saddle.

"So long, Grit," he sang out.

He blew a kiss to Van Bleit as he cantered past.

"You'll fancy yourself an Indian Brave when you wear my wig on your watch-chain," he cried.

Van Bleit scowled yet more fiercely, and consoled himself with planning future vengeance against this impudent impostor to whom he owed his downfall. If ever fortune played into his hands he would have Tom Hayhurst's life.

XXVI

LAWLESS had during a chequered career spent many an eventful night round a camp fire, but no more strange experience had he passed through than on that night, guarding Van Bleit on the open veld.

The night was cold, with a fresh wind blowing. The Kaffir, who remained greatly against his will, but dared not openly refuse to stay for fear of the baas of the scarred face and compelling eye, gathered wood and made a fire, before which Lawless sat with his revolver at his hand, and Van Bleit stretched himself on the cushions that had been taken from the cart and flung down on the veld. He feigned slumber, but did not actually close his eyes throughout the night. He watched his captor incessantly, hoping that sleep would overtake him ; but Lawless sat wakeful and alert, with his eyes upon the flames, only moving at long intervals when he rose to throw fresh wood upon the fire.

There was nothing to eat, and only a small quantity of spirit in Van Bleit's flask. The Kaffir had a pocketful of mealies which he chewed before the fire. Close by their uitspan was a watercourse from whence he fetched water in small quantities in the empty flask.

Van Bleit complained of hunger. He also complained of cold, and of the tightness of the rope that bound his wrists. In common humanity, Lawless loosened the knots. He had no fancy to torture the man. But if Van Bleit had hoped by this means to slip his bonds he was doomed to disappointment. They were more comfortable, but none the less secure.

He lay still afterwards for a long while feigning sleep ; and Lawless, watching intently, observed by the uncertain flickering light, that now leapt upward in a tongue of brilliant flame, and again died down to a dull red glow that left all beyond the immediate circle round the fire in absolute darkness, that with every interval of obscurity Van Bleit drew himself stealthily nearer the fire. When he lay quite close to the hot embers with his bound hands among them, Lawless rose, flung on fresh wood to make a blaze, and leisurely approaching the recumbent figure, stirred it with his boot.

"Get back," he said. "I don't mind you blistering your hands, that's your look out ; but I object to you trying to burn that rope."

Van Bleit rolled back on his cushions without replying, and lay still again ; and Lawless sat as before, smoking his pipe to solace his empty stomach, with his revolver beside him, and his eyes on the leaping flames. Only the Kaffir slept, and his rest was tranquil and unbroken, in strange contrast with the silent conflict that was going on close by him on the opposite side of the fire.

The stars sloped to the westward, and the night grew darker, with the heavy blackness that precedes the dawn. The wind died away. Cold and still and strangely pure was the feel of the air. Lawless kicked the fire into a blaze and looked down at Van Bleit.

"Want a smoke ?" he asked.

"Yes."

Van Bleit's tone was sulky. Lawless took his pipe from his pocket and filled it for him. He put the stem in his mouth and held a match to the bowl. Van Bleit was not gracious. He wanted to smoke badly or he would have refused the offer.

"Makes a man feel a precious fool," he said.

"Makes him look one," Lawless answered.

He returned to his place and sat silent and still,

watching for the dawn. It came with a faint breath of wind in the trees, just a whispering stir among the leaves. Then silence again, and the light broke like a white line drawn horizontally upon the blackboard of the sky. Lawless watched it broaden, grow brighter, till it dispersed the surrounding blackness, and objects and landmarks familiar in the daylight began to take definite shape and form. He stretched himself wearily and looked about him. His glance fell on Van Bleit, pallid, red-eyed, obviously suffering, observing him with the baleful look of some savage captive beast.

He got up and took a few short rapid turns to circulate his blood. It was cold in the dawn, and the fire was dying. There was no more wood to throw on. He had spent nights like this in the Boer lines during the war, but he had never been told off single-handed to guard a prisoner.

He kept a watchful eye on the east for the first flushing of the clouds. Never had he welcomed the sun more gratefully than when it lifted itself indolently from the rose clouds that veiled its rising and soared above them into the blue of the morning sky. Van Bleit stirred, stretched himself to the warmth as an animal does, and sat up.

"Blast you!" he snarled. "When are you going to make a move out of this? I want some breakfast. I'm famished. . . . And I've got a chill. My clothes are wet through with the dew."

Lawless looked at his watch.

"There's lots of time yet," he answered cheerfully. "You won't hurt for a little fasting. When a man habitually overfeeds it's good for his stomach to give it a rest."

"How long are you for keeping me here?" Van Bleit asked, his voice quivering with repressed rage.

"I'm giving Tom his chance to get to the Bank," Lawless answered. "After that, I've no further interest in your movements."

Van Bleit eyed him calculatingly. His courage had returned to a certain degree since he had suffered no personal violence. He felt reassured on that point. But his respect for his captor was no greater on that account. Had their relative positions been reversed he would have acted very differently.

"My arms are numb," he grumbled. "Can't you put me on parole and undo this cord? It's the very devil I'm suffering in my wrists."

But Lawless was wholly unmoved.

"When we part company," he said, "I'll free them—which is more than you did for me. As for your parole! . . . I wouldn't place greater trust in your word than I would in that of a Kaffir."

Van Bleit controlled himself with an effort.

"You're armed, and I'm not," he sneered.

"Yes, I'm armed. But I'm not going to put myself to the trouble of sitting with my finger on the trigger."

Van Bleit got up and walked about. He was stiff and hungry, and his head ached. He believed he had a touch of fever. He was subject to intermittent attacks, and lying out all night with no protection from the heavy dews was sufficient to bring on an attack. He cursed volubly as he tramped about, and swore swift and dire vengeance on his enemy, who, exercising also with his hands in his coat pockets, was keeping a steady watch on his movements.

The Kaffir awoke after a while, and, rolling over, stared about him as if wondering how he came to be amid his present surroundings. Then his eye encountered the terrible eye of the strange baas with the scar upon his face, and he scrambled to his feet and grinned nervously.

"In an hour's time I shall want the horses inspanned, John."

"Ja, baas."

The Kaffir made off. There was in the woolly head instructed at the Mission-station a suspicion that the tall, stern-faced baas with the eye that pierced through one, and the ugly scar along his jaw, was, if not the Devil himself, a very near relation. Had he suddenly disappeared in smoke with his captive, though it would have terrified the black man, it would not greatly have astonished him.

As he moved rapidly away to where the horses were hitched to the pole of the cart he came upon one of his former gods, a strange-looking insect that, after the manner of the chameleon, took on the shade of the grass upon which it fed. It closely resembled in form a forked blade of coarse grass. With a surreptitious look about him to make certain he was not observed, the Kaffir bowed before his one-time god and uttered a weird invocation in his native tongue for protection against the white man's Devil. Then in order to square the white man's God he looked up at the blue sky in the hope that the great mysterious Being, who was somewhere behind the clouds, was not conversant with the Kaffir language, and so had failed to understand his lapse into idolatry, and cried aloud, parrot-fashion, a prayer he had been taught in English when he became a convert at the Mission, because his brother Klaus had joined the Mission, and had a blanket given him, and plenty good things when he was zwak. But the chance encounter with the little grass-god, which, being tangible, was easier of comprehension, did more to reassure him than the prayer sent into the blue distance which, having such a long way to travel, might never reach.

The Kaffir's idea of time was vague. He went by

the sun. One hour the sun him so much higher. He rubbed down the horses as best he could, having nothing to groom them with save handfuls of grass, and led them away to the watercourse to drink. He did not hasten to return, but kept an observant eye on the sun, fearful of incurring the baas' anger by overstaying the limit. When he judged the hour up he returned to the uitspan and proceeded to harness the horses. The baas still stood with his hands in his pockets ; but he no longer watched the other baas, who was reclining again on the cushions of the cart, a huddled inert mass of misery. The game was up, and he had lost finally. He felt like a man who has toiled honestly and laboriously and been scandalously defrauded of the rewards of his industry.

The Kaffir finished harnessing the horses, and then came up for the cushions. Lawless spoke to Van Bleit, and he got up sullenly, kicking the native savagely as he stooped and reached out a dusky hand. The Kaffir shot a venomous glance at him, but uttered no verbal protest. He gathered up the cushions and carried them away and arranged them in the cart. Then he mounted to his seat and sat with the reins in his hands, waiting.

Lawless again addressed himself to Van Bleit.

"Turn round," he said curtly, "and I'll unfasten your wrists."

Van Bleit's arms were so cramped when eventually they were released that for some time he could only work them gently, moving his wrists and fingers and relaxing his stiffened muscles. The inconvenience and the pain in them did not improve his temper. And when it became clear to him there was no room in the cart for him, that he must walk many miles before he could get a conveyance or break his fast, his rage was beyond control.

"You devil!" he shouted. "You dirty low cad of

a Kaffir ! Look out for your skin, that's all. I keep my word regardless of consequences, and I say that for this you shall pay—and pay dearly, you hired spy who does another man's dirty work."

"Drive on," said Lawless indifferently ; and the Kaffir promptly whipped up his horses and drove off at a furious rate.

The little schoolmaster was seated at breakfast when the Cape cart clattered noisily up the sunny street, and Lawless, descending from it, entered the hotel. He went to his room, stripped, bathed, and changed his clothes ; then he repaired in all haste to the dining-room, and nodding to Mr. Burton, sat down at the end of the table.

"I'm famished," he said. "But if you'll give me a little time in which to take the brunt off an appetite that seems as though it would never be satisfied, I'll be ready to accompany you as we arranged."

The mild eyes behind the glasses blinked their surprise and their pleasure in equal degrees.

"Oh ! plenty of time ! plenty of time !" he asserted, and quietly pushed the butter and rolls and fruit nearer the new-comer's hand. "It's early. . . . I am glad to see you. I was afraid you might not be returning."

Lawless fell to on his breakfast when it made its appearance with a zest that astonished his companion.

"What a good thing it is to have a healthy appetite," he observed. "Early rising and a drive before breakfast suit you, my friend."

Lawless laughed grimly.

"For the first time I experience a sneaking sympathy with the cannibal. . . . I could almost eat you."

Even a much neglected appetite reaches its limit in time. The quantity of food that Lawless managed to dispose of was a revelation to the schoolmaster ; he had never in all his life been equal to making such a meal.

"You have a good digestion," he remarked. "It is a fine thing."

"No doubt," Lawless answered. "But it becomes assertive when a man neglects to give it work. And now, Mr. Burton, I won't keep you waiting any longer. Your patience has stood a test this morning that mine would not bear so well."

"Indeed, I have been well entertained," the other assured him.

"In watching the exhibition of a man's eating prowess! You are more easily amused than I am."

"I imagine that to be so. I belong to a generation that enjoyed simpler pleasures than you men of the present day. But I fancy we who took pleasure in simple things got more joy out of life. . . . I may be wrong."

"Joy! There's precious little joy in life that I can see," Lawless replied, and rose, scraping his chair noisily upon the carpetless floor. The little man looked at him earnestly.

"I am not a philosopher," he said, "nor have I over much learning—just enough for the exercise of my profession, and no more. But I can tell you the reason you find no joy in life; it is because you don't know where to look for it. Joy lies in ourselves."

Lawless laughed shortly.

"I'm not a likely sort of subject to harbour joy," he returned.

"Why not?" the other said quite simply. . . . "You shut the door in her face, my friend, or she would find her way in fast enough. Give her a chance."

He took up his hat, and lighted his old meerschaum pipe before going out.

"On a day like this," he said, "it makes a man joyful merely to feel he is alive."

It was a great pleasure to the schoolmaster to walk

along beside his tall companion and point out to him the many beauties of the place, beauties which alone Lawless would assuredly have overlooked. A lizard, peeping with bright eyes between the stones of a piece of broken wall, caught the little man's attention. As they approached it darted into a crack and disappeared. The schoolmaster pointed to it like an eager boy who discovers something rare. Despite his boredom at such trifles, Lawless was faintly amused. A wild flower, a humming-bird, a large green butterfly, each in turn excited interest, and called forth admiration and comment.

The man was a botanist, and spoke learnedly of the flora of the neighbourhood. The wild flowers of the Cape have yet to be properly classified ; many of them are unnamed ; they are simply "bloemetjes." The schoolmaster had named many of them to please himself. He picked a beautiful pure white bloom from the veld, and gave it to Lawless to admire.

"It is so flawless, so pure," he said. "I call that my Flower of Innocence. The veld is full of them. But they are scentless. One day someone will take it, perhaps, and cultivate it and give it a scent. But I like it best as nature has made it. To me it is perfect."

Lawless placed it in his buttonhole, not that he cared for wearing flowers, but because—why he did not know—it pleased him to give pleasure to this simple-minded man.

The schoolmaster introduced his friend to his pupils, a proceeding that was fraught with embarrassment to both sides. Never in his life before had Lawless felt so great a fool. He was glad to make his escape.

Mr. Burton parted from him reluctantly. He went a little way with him on his backward journey, and stood for quite ten minutes looking after the tall figure as it strode away over the veld. Afterwards he was

heard to assert that Providence had without doubt moved him to act as he acted that morning. No man was ever more conscientious in the performance of his duties than this man, yet here was he lingering in the sunshine, gazing after a departing acquaintance while his pupils idled their time away waiting for him in vain.

Mr. Burton held no class that morning.

As he was about to turn back to his work he saw a strange sight. The figure he was watching suddenly threw up its arms and fell and lay upon the veld quite motionless, so that had he not seen the falling of it he would not have known that it was there. And galloping away from the spot where the man had fallen was another man seated on a raw-boned white horse.

The schoolmaster was no athlete, but he put foot to ground and ran for all he was worth.

XXVII

COLONEL GREY lay in bed smoking his customary, before-breakfast cigar. He was not an early riser—or, as he expressed it, he had had so much early rising during his life that he was justified in taking his leisure.

He was unaccountably thinking of Lawless and the letters. He still half-trusted and half-doubted his man. That is to say, at times his belief in him was unbounded, and again at other moments, according to his mood, he mistrusted the man's honesty of purpose. Reckless, impecunious, an admitted adventurer, were not the chances even that if he got hold of the letters he would turn them to his own purposes? With such a source of profit in his possession, would he be likely to give it up for the sum originally agreed upon between them? Colonel Grey could not altogether conquer his suspicions; the man's past life had prejudiced him.

While he lay thinking, sending clouds of blue smoke-rings up from the pillow like smoke from a sacrificial altar, the bell of his front door was rung loudly and imperatively. As it was not answered with the promptitude that could only have been possible had a doorkeeper been stationed in readiness, the bell pealed again. Colonel Grey got out of bed and went to the window. He had already paddled out of bed once to admit his boy, for no servant slept in the house; and he paddled across the room a second time, jerked open the window, and looked out. It was with an involuntary exclamation of surprise that he recognised Tom Hayhurst.

"Good Lord!" he ejaculated.

And then, in accents of anger:

"What the devil are you pulling that bell down for?"

Hayhurst came forward, saluted the irate speaker, and followed him into the bedroom.

"I thought I paid you to clear out," the Colonel observed sharply, eyeing with no great favour the spruce, confident young man he had last seen—or so he imagined—with a bandaged head, taking his passage to Durban.

"You did, sir."

Hayhurst controlled his countenance with difficulty. In dealing with the Colonel he made it a practice to allow him to let off steam first. It gave a man a chance of second place, he used to say.

"Then, why in hell are you back here? . . . I've no further use for you."

"I'm not asking you to use me," Hayhurst answered coolly. "I came by Lawless' orders, to give into your own hands the packet of letters which I've just received from the Bank."

He put his hand inside his coat as he spoke, and withdrew a sealed packet from an inner pocket, which, in a matter-of-fact manner, he tendered the Colonel. The Colonel nearly collapsed at sight of it. The cigar dropped from his lips, his mouth fell helplessly open.

"The—letters!" he gasped.

He stretched forth an eager hand that shook with his excitement, and almost tore the packet from Hayhurst's grasp.

"Sit down, my boy," he said. . . . "Sit down." He turned the packet lovingly. "Good God! the letters—at last!"

Breaking the seal with fingers that in their feverish eagerness could scarce perform their office, he glanced

through the contents, counted the letters, and finally, going to a drawer and unlocking it, he took out a note-book to which he referred continually while he went through the packet again.

"It's all right," he said. . . . "They're all here."

He snatched up a box of matches, and carrying the letters to the grate, thrust them between the bars and set light to them. Hayhurst watched with him while they burnt, dividing his attention between the flaming papers and the intent set face of the man who crouched before the hearth, watching, watching, while the letters that had cost much money and a man's life were swiftly reduced to ashes. When only the charred and blackened paper remained; Colonel Grey took the ashes up in his hands and crumbled them to powder. He drew a long breath of relief.

"They've cost dear," he muttered,—“too dear. . . . But they'll do no more harm.”

He rose and, turning, stared into the young man's eyes.

"A moment since," he said, and his voice trembled with an emotion he could not altogether subdue, "it seemed to me that nothing mattered outside that," and he pointed to the ashes in the grate. "Now I'm back in the world again, and I want to know how you came to have them in your possession."

"It's a fairly long story," Hayhurst said. "It's taken weeks to bring to a successful issue."

The Colonel shook his head.

"Don't you get into the habit of drinking before breakfast, my boy," he said.

Tom Hayhurst laughed. His eye had certainly travelled towards a syphon and bottle of whisky that stood on the washstand.

"You don't know what I've been through," he said. "Besides, I have breakfasted. And I've been strict teetotal practically ever since I've been working with

Lawless. It was a condition he made in taking me on."

The Colonel went to the washstand to cleanse his hands.

"Pity to break it," he said. "But help yourself; if you've a mind to."

When he had washed he got back into bed, and Hayhurst sat on a chair facing him, with a glass of whisky in his hand.

"We'll have to go back to the beginning," he said, "if you want to follow the yarn—that is, to the time when Lawless left Cape Town before poor Simmonds' murder. You may remember he left Cape Town with a companion."

"I do," Colonel Grey answered drily. "I have reason to remember."

"So have I," Hayhurst rejoined.

"Indeed!"

"You see, I was with him," he explained, taking pleasure in the Colonel's open amazement. "We were in Stellenbosch together."

"You!—With that she——"

"Devil," prompted the young man cheerfully. "Yes! She wasn't half a bad sort either. You mustn't call her names. I've a sneaking affection for her."

"I can imagine you would have."

The Colonel snipped a fresh cigar, and lighted it, and lay with his hands clasped behind his head eyeing the youngster curiously as, in obedience to a nod, he helped himself from the box of cigars that stood on the table beside the bed.

"I suppose you wouldn't believe me," he hazarded, "if I were to tell you that that was the most platonic friendship Grit Lawless ever indulged in?"

"I should say that your ideas and mine of platonism were widely different," was the response.

Hayhurst laughed.

"Did you ever see the lady at close quarters?" he asked.

"No. . . . And have no wish to."

"I fancy you are labouring under a mistake. . . . You are looking at her now."

He stroked his clean-shaven lip to hide his amusement, and his blue eyes smiled at the Colonel, who, in incredulous amazement, stared back at him from the pillow.

"I never reckoned myself an effeminate-looking fellow," he said; "but I'm a tremendous success in petticoats—though it took a thundering lot of paint, no matter how carefully I shaved."

"You lying young devil!" the Colonel ejaculated. "I don't believe a word of it."

"Van Bleit wouldn't either," Hayhurst answered, calmly sipping his whisky, "if I hadn't changed my sex in front of him. I left him my hair as a keepsake. . . . His friendship wasn't as platonic as old Grit's."

The Colonel half sat up as a light broke in on him.

"And that," he exclaimed with conviction, "is how you got hold of the letters?"

"No." Tom Hayhurst leant forward with his hand on the counterpane, his boyish face flushed and eager. "All the credit for getting hold of the letters belongs to Lawless," he said. "I was merely the decoy for leading Van Bleit into his hands. He managed the rest. He's fine, Grit Lawless—a man . . . a white man. My conscience! you ought to have been with us yesterday and seen him handle Van Bleit."

He furnished a description of the scene on the veld, and the Colonel listened in silence, save for an occasional appreciative grunt.

"And I left him," the boy finished admiringly, "guarding the beast. He might have put a bullet into him and saved himself the trouble; instead of which I

expect he has been sitting by him all night. I tell you, when Grit undertakes a thing he doesn't half do it."

Colonel Grey looked thoughtfully at the speaker. He was remembering how at their last meeting Lawless had said to him, with reference to Van Bleit, that he was keener on killing the man than anything else.

"I wouldn't be too sure," he said, "that he didn't put his bullet into him after you were gone."

But Tom Hayhurst had no doubts on that head.

"Grit isn't the man to shoot another with his hands tied, and unarmed," he said. "He wouldn't even lash him so, although I wanted him to. I've got a blunter sense of honour, I suppose; but I don't believe in being generous to swine like Karl Van Bleit."

"No," the Colonel agreed.

He smoked for a few moments in silence. Then he put the end of the cigar down in the ashtray, and flung back the bedclothes.

"You say you've breakfasted! It must have been a fairly early meal. You'd better stay and breakfast with me. When do you suppose Lawless will be coming down?"

"To-night, I expect. He didn't say. But there's nothing to keep him there. I shall meet the train anyway."

"I'd like to see him." The Colonel frowned thoughtfully. "Pity!" he said. "I'm dining out to-night—at the Smythes'. If it had been any other house I would have sent an excuse. But, owing to the trial, things have been a bit strained. To-night will be the first time I have been to the house since that affair. . . . I can't very well get out of it."

"Leave early, sir," Hayhurst suggested, "and come round to his hotel."

"And suppose he shouldn't arrive?"

"Oh! he'll arrive right enough. . . . If he doesn't, I'll manage to let you know."

There was no happier man in Cape Town that day than Colonel Grey when he went into the city and cabled Home to the person it most concerned the news of success. It had taken months to accomplish at a terrific cost, but the matter was ended, and the incriminating letters were beyond reach for any purpose evil or the reverse.

Because his conscience accused him of having misjudged the man, quite as much as in recognition of his valuable services, he determined to use his influence with the greater influence behind him in getting Lawless some honourable occupation that would give him a fresh start. There was use in the world for men like that. The idea grew in his mind and took definite shape. He decided to talk it over with Lawless when they met and then write home. Whatever his past, he merited some consideration for his present services. The impulse of the moment is no correct index to a man's nature, and only a crude sense of justice assigns life-long punishment for the sins of youth. In Colonel Grey's opinion Grit Lawless had expiated his crime.

He went to the Smythes' that evening with his thoughts still revolving around Lawless' future, which quite suddenly had become of immense importance to him. It was his liking for the man, that strange unaccountable feeling he had had for him at their first meeting which, despite prejudice and later distrust, he had never managed to conquer, that made him so extraordinarily anxious to hold out a helping hand. Simmonds, the man who was dead, had had a similar regard for him; and the boy, Tom Hayhurst, in a more exaggerated degree realised the magnetic attraction of his personality. Given a second chance, Colonel Grey was fully convinced that Lawless would carve out a future for himself of which no man need be ashamed. It remained for him to see that a suitable chance offered.

By an odd coincidence the first person he came

across in the Smythes' drawing-room after greeting his hostess was Mrs. Lawless. He was, he discovered later, to take her in to dinner. He had not seen her to speak to since the evening he had called upon her at the time of Simmonds' murder, and he was not quite sure until she turned and spoke to him how he stood in her regard.

She was looking very lovely, but older, he decided. He had never observed anyone age as she had within a few months. There were lines in her face that had not been there when he first knew her, and her eyes were sadder, her bearing altogether less confident. Some people might have considered her less attractive on this account; but to him, in the clouded expression of the thoughtful eyes, in the thin line that ran from nose to mouth, there was a pathetic appeal that was infinitely womanly, and therefore more alluring than the proud defiance of youth.

She held out her hand to him, and smiled a welcome.

"I began to think that you and I were not to meet again," she said.

"That is a very gracious speech," he answered, "for it permits me the belief that you were not unwilling for a meeting. But there is a grim suggestion underlying the words that pleases me less. Is it my speedy dissolution you anticipate?"

"No," she answered quietly. "But—I thought you might have heard—I'm going Home."

"Indeed!" he said, and looked at her with quickened interest. "That's news to me. Do you leave shortly?"

"Next week," she replied slowly, her fingers entwining themselves in the silver girdle at her waist. "I never intended to stay very long, you know. I came to. . . . Just on a visit."

"And you return satisfied?" he asked, and knew

not why he asked the question, nor why she should look at him so strangely with so sad an expression in the look.

"No," she replied.

There was a perceptible pause. He pulled his heavy moustache, and his shrewd eyes met hers with a look of understanding and sympathy. He did not know what her purpose had been in coming out, but he felt she had followed no idle whim, nor sought merely health or pleasure from the visit. She had come, as he had come, for a definite purpose, and while he was leaving with his mission accomplished, she returned discouraged with her object unattained.

"I'm sorry for that," he said. . . . "If there is any way in which I can be of service to you. . . ."

She shook her head.

"I go back as I came," she said. . . . "It was a venture. But at least I have the consolation of knowing that the attempt has been made. One can't help one's failures." She looked into the grave, distinguished face and smiled. "We are in danger of growing serious," she said.

"Look here," he cried quickly, moved by some inexplicable and irresistible impulse, a sense of chivalry perhaps that her evident depression roused in him. "You say you are going home next week. I propose going also. If I can make my arrangements in the time, would it be agreeable to you that I should travel in the same boat?"

"You!" Her voice as well as her face expressed astonishment. "Then you—— Have you accomplished your purpose in coming out?" she asked.

A glow of satisfaction overspread his features.

"I have," he answered, and was conscious of feeling half ashamed to show his joy in the successful issue of his undertaking.

She rested her hand, oblivious of the people about them, for a moment on his arm.

"Oh! I'm glad," she said . . . "I'm glad. That's finished with. I have always felt those letters would cost another life."

"God forbid!" he muttered, and added reassuringly: "They're past doing harm now. . . . They're destroyed. I burnt them myself—to-day."

She drew a long breath that was, he felt, a sigh of genuine relief. He looked at her curiously. He had never understood her interest in the letters, but he knew she was very greatly interested; and her relief in the knowledge of their destruction conclusively proved that in this matter at least she had no sympathy with Karl Van Bleit. He sometimes wondered whether he had not been mistaken in his opinion as to her feeling for Van Bleit.

"They are making a move," he said to her. And then, as Theodore Smythe spoke to him in passing, he turned to her and offered her his arm. "I have the pleasure of taking you in," he added.

And neither of them remembered, then or later, that his question as to travelling Home with her remained unanswered.

Colonel Grey left the Smythes' early as he had arranged to do, and Mrs. Lawless, who was going on elsewhere, took her departure at the same time.

"I am crowding all the dissipation possible into my last week," she explained, but withheld the reason for this feverish activity.

He gave her his arm and led her out to the waiting motor. As he came out of the gate Tom Hayhurst, who had been dawdling about for him for the past half-hour, stepped quickly forward; then seeing who was with him stopped abruptly, and drew back. But Mrs. Lawless had seen and recognised him.

"Mr. Hayhurst!" she exclaimed, in a voice of surprise, and held out her hand.

"You were going to cut me," she said, as he came forward again.

He laughed self-consciously. He was a fool for harbouring malice. Whatever part she had played in the matter of his broken head, she was an alluringly beautiful woman, and that in his opinion excused a great deal.

"Pardon!" he returned. "I was merely diffident as to my welcome."

She suddenly smiled.

"I rather suspect," she said, "that you are accustomed to being forgiven. I haven't any faith in your diffidence."

Hayhurst opened the door of the car for her and she got in.

"How is it you are not in evening dress? If you had been I would have taken you on to the subscription dance, which is where you ought to be, instead of hanging about other people's doorways."

"If I'd only known sooner! . . ." he murmured regretfully.

She looked at Colonel Grey, who, grave and silent, stood behind the younger man.

"Can I drop you anywhere?" she asked.

"Thank you, no," he answered. "I've an engagement with Mr. Lawless at his hotel."

Mrs. Lawless started.

"He hasn't come, sir," she heard Tom Hayhurst saying. And then, in reply to an inaudible question: "I met the train. He wasn't there. Van Bleit came by it."

There was a muttered exclamation from the Colonel, and Hayhurst added:

"Yes! I don't like the look of it myself."

"Well, tell me presently."

The words were spoken as a caution. Mrs. Lawless leaned forward over the door, the light of the street lamp shining on her white face.

"Tell him now," she said in a low voice. "I want to hear."

Hayhurst stared back at her.

"There's nothing to tell," he stammered. "We expected Lawless by the train this evening. . . . He didn't come. That's all."

"Where is he?" she asked.

"At Kraaifontein."

She thought for a moment.

"And Karl Van Bleit was at Kraaifontein too?"

"Yes. . . . He's back now."

Mrs. Lawless looked straight into the Colonel's eyes.

"He got the letters for you," she said, and he knew that she referred to Lawless though she did not utter his name.

"Yes."

For the life of him the Colonel could think of nothing further to say. He was aware that the same suspicion that was in his own mind was in hers; and he had no reassurance to offer. He could find no word to supplement his bald affirmative. The pause lengthened.

"Another life!" she whispered. . . . "I always felt——"

She touched Tom Hayhurst's sleeve.

"Tell him to drive home," she said, and sat back in her seat.

Colonel Grey stepped quickly to the door.

"Don't worry," he said. . . . "I'm going up to-morrow. . . . I'll let you know immediately."

The car drove away, and the two men were left staring blankly into one another's eyes.

"What's he to her?" Tom Hayhurst asked.

But the Colonel shook his head. Here was a complication he had not foreseen. They turned and walked on together. Hayhurst was excited and inclined to hunt up Van Bleit and have an explanation, but his companion quashed the idea.

"You are positive, I suppose, it was Van Bleit you saw?"

"Of course I am. I got quite close to him once, and he grinned at me. I tell you, I didn't like that grin. I followed after him. I wanted to hit his face for showing his teeth at me, but he got into a taxi and drove off. He was looking sick too, beastly sick. . . . There's been foul play,—I'm certain of it. I'd have suspected it by Van Bleit turning up and Grit not; but when I saw that beast's smug, vindictive grin, I knew it."

"Well, I'll find out to-morrow," Colonel Grey said.

"I'm going up the line with you. If anything's happened to Grit, whatever hole Van Bleit sneaks into, I'll see he pays."

XXVIII

COLONEL GREY flung a suit of pyjamas and a few toilet accessories into a handbag and started out for the station. He was very much perturbed. Against his judgment he was greatly affected by Mrs. Lawless' forebodings of the previous night ; her softly uttered, prophetic—they seemed to him prophetic—words : "I have always felt those letters would cost another life."

And as a foundation for this belief, Tom Hayhurst had turned up with his tale of suspicion and his unreserved misgivings that had insensibly given rise to similar doubts in his own mind. What a finish to a life of failure ! . . . If this, indeed, should prove the end ! He recalled his recently formulated plans for the man's future . . . the chance he had thought to give him ; and a hard look came into his eyes, his lips tightened. Those ashes in the grate had indeed cost dear !

Tom Hayhurst was already on the platform when he made his appearance from the direction of the booking-office. He came forward quickly to meet him, his boyish face grave and concerned.

"I saw Van Bleit come out of the shipping-office when I passed on my way here," he said. "I tried to stop him, but he eluded me, and I daren't give chase for fear of missing the train. I take it he was booking his passage to England. He means clearing out. . . . Looks queer, eh ?"

Colonel Grey nodded briefly.

"It'll take a bigger world than this for him to lose himself in, if he's killed Grit," the young man said.

They turned and walked the length of the platform side by side. The train was in the station, and passengers were leisurely selecting their seats. From the door of the booking-office as they came opposite to it, among a hurrying group of late arrivals, Mrs. Lawless emerged, tall and composed and very pale, with a cluster of early roses, fresh gathered with the dew still on them, drooping in her hands. A servant accompanied her carrying luggage. It was evident that she too was going by the train.

The Colonel was the first to see her ; Hayhurst in his preoccupation had eyes for no one. He stopped, regarded her in surprise, and raised his hat.

"Mrs. Lawless !" he exclaimed. "You ! . . . Surely you are not thinking——"

She looked him steadily in the eyes.

"I am going to Kraaifontein, Colonel Grey," she interrupted him—"to find my husband."

It was not often that the Colonel was startled beyond all power of lucid expression, but in the extremity of his amazement words failed him.

"Your—Eh ?" he said, and stood still on the platform and stared at her.

He felt a touch on his arm.

"Unless you want to be left behind, you'd better take your seat."

Tom Hayhurst stood at his elbow, his blue eyes on the woman's face, with a mingling of respect in them and wondering resentment. He hurried them to the train, opened the door of an empty carriage, and shut it on them with a bang.

"Send me a wire," he said.

The Colonel thrust his head out of the window.

"You're not coming ?"

"No." The young man gave an expressive glance in the direction of Mrs. Lawless, seated in the far corner of the carriage with the fragrant drooping flowers in her lap. "Grit wouldn't thank us for making a picnic, or a funeral party, of it with her there," he said.

Colonel Grey understood.

"I'll let you know immediately," he promised, and sank back on the cushions, taking off his hat and mopping his much perplexed and perspiring brow as the train moved slowly out.

He looked across at Mrs. Lawless. She was gazing out of the window at the sunny country as it swept past her view with eyes that saw nothing consciously, and with thoughts, he rightly conjectured, far away from her surroundings. He tried to think of her in this new connection that she had sprung on him so suddenly and for which he had been so wholly unprepared; tried, but failed to remember, what Lawless had said in respect of his relationship with her that had so entirely misled him. He recalled that he had asked point blank whether he was a connection of hers, recalled too the ambiguous answer to his question: "By marriage only." Truly a man may usually be said to be related to his wife by marriage only. But the answer had been given with intent to deceive. And Lawless had said other things that had tended to turn his mind from any such suspicion. For private reasons he had desired to conceal the fact of his marriage.

It was long before Mrs. Lawless turned her face in his direction; when she did he saw that her eyes were filled with a great hopelessness, and something that resembled dread. Unconsciously she fingered the roses in her lap, touching them with a nervous caressing hand.

"I am afraid," she said, and looked at him wistfully. "I have never imagined anything like this. . . . I thought

I was going Home without ever seeing his face again. I had reconciled myself to that. And now. . . . It ought not to be more difficult to part from the dead than to part irrevocably from the living. But it is."

She looked down suddenly at the roses, and lifted them gently, and laid them against her face.

"I brought them for him," she said simply.

"I think it would be wiser," he returned, "not to make up your mind to misfortune. It is quite possible that when we arrive we shall find Mr. Lawless in perfect health. There are absolutely no grounds for supposing otherwise."

"I have a feeling that all is not well," she answered quietly. "That feeling was with me throughout the night; and in my sleep I heard him call me. . . . My own imagination! . . . Yes, I know. He wouldn't ask for me."

She turned her face away and gazed out of the window again.

"Do you think," she asked presently, after a further lengthy silence, and in her tone and manner it was apparent how great was the effort it cost her to touch upon the subject, "that she will be with him? . . . that woman?"

Colonel Grey sat up suddenly as though a bomb had been flung at him. He had forgotten since his knowledge of Tottie's identity that this thing had been an open scandal, and that she must know of it.

"Good Lord, no!" he answered. And added quickly: "There wasn't any woman."

He moved down to her end of the compartment, and leaning forward took both her hands and held them firmly.

"You haven't allowed that to come between you?" he asked gently.

The tears rose in her eyes.

"It didn't help," she whispered. . . . "But you see—I am going to him in spite of it."

"It was a cruel thing to let you believe that," he said, and dropped her hands, and sat back against the cushions, watching her. "I'll tell you the story as I heard it myself yesterday."

And he related to her unreservedly the history of Tottie and her connection with Lawless in the recovery of the letters. When he had finished he found that she was quietly weeping with her face hidden in her gloveless hands.

He left her to herself and returning to his former seat sat stiffly upright, staring out of the window with unseeing eyes beneath their knitted brows. It would seem that those letters had more to answer for than even he had supposed. He wondered whether, could he have foreseen all that this enterprise would involve, he would have consented to its undertaking.

There was a prolonged silence. Mrs. Lawless rose after a while, moved by what impulse he failed to understand, and dropped the sweet scented roses from the window. She turned round and faced him after doing so, and he felt that already she regretted the act.

"They were dying," she explained, and went nearer to him and sat down opposite. "It was a foolish thought to pick them."

"It was a kind thought," he returned.

She looked at him gravely.

"Colonel Grey," she said, "a man must hate a woman when he can let her believe—what my husband allowed me to believe. Nothing less than hate could be so cruel as that."

He looked her straight in the eyes.

"Dear lady, don't you know," he asked, "how closely love and hate are allied so that it is difficult to separate the one from the other? It is possible for a man to

hate the woman who is dear to him. I've known such cases."

"I can understand," she said, and looked thoughtfully out upon the passing country, "moments of impulsive hate. But systematic hate. . . . That's different."

She pulled at the strap of the window absently, and continued to gaze out at the scenery, while the shadows darkened the sun-flecked eyes, and memories stirred in their troubled depths that, far away now but still unsoftened, covered over a space of hopeless years. She had loved her husband with such an intensity of passion, and yet she had failed somehow to satisfy him. She had failed him most at the moment he particularly needed help and sympathy—at the time of his disgrace. Her love for him had had its root to a great extent in her pride in him. The fall of her pride was tremendous. His dismissal from the Service cut her more deeply than at that time of hysterical patriotism his death could have. The blow hardened her. Instead of loving encouragement, unsympathetic silence was all she offered. And he turned from her and sought comfort elsewhere. Another woman came into his life. Zoë Lawless did not know how brief had been that interval of madness. She had refused to hear explanations, had withheld forgiveness. He had written to her, offering facilities for her release. To that she had replied that if he wished it, if he desired to give the woman the protection of his name, she would submit to the humiliation of having their affairs dragged through the courts. He had answered that he was merely considering her, that he had no wishes in the matter, and should certainly not re-marry if she divorced him.

After that there had been unbroken silence between them, and she lost sight of him for many years. During those years, in the lonely watches of the night, she had often lain awake thinking of him, wondering about him ;

and her conscience had reproached her for throwing that undisciplined nature back upon itself. When, unexpectedly, under the will of an eccentric relative she inherited a comfortable fortune she determined to follow after him. She had heard from her cousin in Cape Town that Lawless was in Africa; and so she came to Africa to find him, with some vague idea in her mind that they might possibly pick up the dropped strands of their lives and interwind them anew. She had earnestly desired this until she met him. When they met she realised how vain had been her hope. And now it was all over. . . . There remained only the bitterness of the empty years.

When they reached Kraaifontein, and the Colonel got out of the train and turned to offer her assistance, she hung back, white and nervous, and caught at the luggage bracket as though to save herself from falling. He took her by the arm and assisted her on to the platform.

"In a little while," he said, with a view to encouraging her, "you will be smiling at your fears. Come now! be brave."

He left her for a moment on the platform while he went to speak to an official. When he returned he endeavoured without success to mask his gravity behind a reassuring smile.

"We'll walk," he said, "it's close here. I've arranged about the luggage."

She looked at him swiftly.

"You've heard something," she said.

"Nothing definite," he answered,— "and nothing very alarming. There is a visitor at the hotel who has met with an accident. That tells us little, but at least it proves he is not dead."

She took his arm and they started to walk.

"If he's only slightly hurt," she said, as they proceeded, "I'll go back again. It would only anger him, my

being here. But if he's too ill to notice—then surely I may stay? . . . You don't think that I should do him harm by staying, then?"

Tears suddenly rose in her eyes, her voice broke.

"Oh! I'm so afraid," she whispered. "Afraid most of all of his coldness."

"I think," he said gently, "you may rest assured he can only feel grateful to you for your consideration."

But notwithstanding his words of comfort she grew more nervous with every step they advanced. Death she could have faced, and faced bravely; she had had to face worse things than that; but the thought of his further coldness—his displeasure, perhaps, at being followed—completely unnerved her.

When they reached the hotel and entered from the sunshine into the small, plainly furnished hall, she sat down on one of the chairs inside the door and left it to Colonel Grey to make inquiries. The first person he saw to put a question to was Mr. Burton. It chanced to be a holiday, and Mr. Burton was spending his leisure in attendance on the man whom, brief though the acquaintance was in respect of time, he had come to regard with an esteem beyond the ordinary. He crossed the hall at the moment of Mrs. Lawless' entry with the Colonel on his way to the sick man's room, and seeing visitors, and one a lady, bowed with his customary courtesy as he passed. The Colonel waylaid him, and taking him aside, stated the object of their visit. Mr. Burton looked puzzled.

"His wife, you say! Strange that he did not mention her. I asked him if there was anyone he would wish informed of his condition; I was prepared to communicate with his friends; but he said no, and I knew no address to telegraph to. He probably feared to alarm her. Does Mrs. Lawless realise what has happened? He's badly hurt."

"What's the damage?" the Colonel asked gruffly. "We know nothing. It is only surmise that has led us here. We've heard no details."

Mr. Burton's mild eyes blinked their astonishment behind their glasses. He had never happened across such an extraordinary sequence of remarkable incidents in all his life before. It fully bore out his oft-repeated assertion that it is not only in big cities that the great events occur.

"He has been shot in the breast," he answered gravely. "His condition is not critical, but it is sufficiently serious. It was the most dastardly attempt upon his life. I witnessed the whole affair,—indeed, Mr. Lawless and I had but a few minutes previously parted company. I am not a vindictive man, I hope, sir; but I should wish the man who was responsible for that cowardly attack to suffer punishment. But I cannot persuade Mr. Lawless to furnish me with a clue as to his identity, and I was too far away to see clearly. Perhaps when Mr. Lawless recovers he may speak of the matter, at present it is not wise to refer to it before him. We have orders to keep him as quiet as possible."

"Who's attending him? . . . Got a decent medical man?" Colonel Grey asked, with some idea in his mind of sending to Cape Town for skilled advice and nurses.

"Oh! we have an excellent man. . . . Out from England for his health. Mr. Lawless is quite well looked after in that respect."

"And nurses?"

The little man looked surprised.

"The landlady does what is necessary," he explained. "I help a little. . . . Yes."

"But—good Lord, man!—he wants trained nursing."

Colonel Grey turned round and spoke to Mrs. Lawless, and she rose from her seat and approached them. The pathos of her expression, her pallor, and her great

personal charm, made a direct appeal to Mr. Burton's kindly nature. Her singular beauty impressed him vividly. While sympathising strongly with her anxiety, he was none the less glad that she had come ; it would be such an agreeable piece of news to break to the sufferer.

"Tell me," she said. "I have watched you talking till I am half afraid to ask. He's ill. . . . He's very ill. . . . I know he is. You are not going to tell me that he will die ?"

"God forbid !" Mr. Burton cried, and was slightly ashamed of his excitement. "He is badly hurt, Mrs. Lawless. But he has a wonderful spirit. He will get over this all right. And with you here to nurse him, why, bless me ! he'll enjoy being ill."

She smiled, but so wanly that it was in his idea infinitely sadder than tears.

"What do you think ?" she said, and looked inquiringly at Colonel Grey. . . . "Ought I to let him know that I am here ?"

"Well, he's got to know some time, I suppose," he answered, and appealed to the schoolmaster. "He isn't so ill but that he can stand a little excitement, eh ?"

"Excitement of that nature would not be likely to hurt him," Mr. Burton answered confidently out of his profound ignorance. "I was just about to visit him. I'm sitting with him to-day. If it is agreeable to you I will break it to him that you are here."

He left them and went upon his errand cheerfully, pleasantly anticipating Lawless' satisfaction in the news. The patient's reception of his wonderful intelligence was an added astonishment to the many surprises of that day. It chilled his gladness as completely as cold water flung upon a cheerful blaze. There was a little spluttering, and the blaze was finally extinguished.

"Help me into my clothes, Burton," the man in the bed said querulously.

"No," Mr. Burton refused. "It would be the death of you."

"Then, get out of this, and I'll dress myself."

The schoolmaster deliberately approached the bed, and looked down kindly into the tormented eyes that stared up at him out of the pallid face upon the pillow. He put out a restraining hand as the patient pushed the bedclothes fretfully aside and attempted to sit up.

"You can't do it, Lawless," he said, endeavouring to soothe him, fearing that he had been over hasty with his news. Delirium alone could account in his opinion for this rash determination to get up.

"Lie still," he entreated. "They will come to you."

"They will do nothing of the sort," Lawless replied, with a lucidity only to be equalled by his determination. "You're an old fool, Burton, and you don't understand. Hand me my clothes, there's a good chap, and so make this matter easier for me."

In response Mr. Burton gathered up the garments and made for the door.

"Very well," Lawless answered grimly, "then I must make my appearance as I am."

The other came back and stood, perplexed and troubled, with the clothes bundled together in his arms, and a guilty look in his eyes as though he had been surprised in the act of stealing.

"You don't mean it?" he said.—"Not seriously?"

"I'm perfectly serious, and entirely rational," Lawless replied quietly. "If you are really anxious that I shouldn't overtax my strength you'll stay and help me dress."

And so it was that the Colonel and Mrs. Lawless were kept waiting for the expected summons.

XXIX

COLONEL GREY led Mrs. Lawless into a room on the right of the hall and rang the bell. He ordered wine, which he insisted on his companion drinking. He also requested that two bedrooms should be in readiness and a meal prepared. The ordinary affairs of life could not be neglected even if the issues at stake were distressingly serious. The Colonel was feeling more settled in mind since he was in possession of the facts. There was no immediate cause for alarm, he decided; and sought to hearten Mrs. Lawless with his sanguine views. But though she appeared to listen she was too obviously nervous to attend to what he said. She sipped her wine, sitting by the fluttering curtains near the open window, looking out at the sunshine.

"Perhaps I ought not to have come," she said once, and appeared while looking at nothing in particular to be watching the road with grave intentness. "I don't think he'll consent to see me."

She was remembering how recently he had said to her that if she sent for him again he would not come. She had not sent, but her presence there amounted to the same thing.

And then after a while the door opened and he came in. The Colonel uttered a sudden exclamation.

"My dear fellow!" he cried in astonishment, his manner charged with grave solicitude. "My dear fellow! Is this wise?"

Mrs. Lawless sprang up from her chair, but he put out a hand and motioned her back, and with her startled

eyes on his leaden face she sank down again without speaking. Lawless took a seat.

"I don't know how you came to hear of this," he said. "I didn't intend it should get about. They're making more of it than they need. In a few days I should have been back in Cape Town."

He looked inquiringly at the Colonel.

"You've seen Hayhurst, I suppose?"

"Yes. He delivered the letters safely." He sat forward and stared at the ghastly suffering face. "He gave me a fairly graphic history of their recovery. The whole circumstances were a huge surprise,—huge. It was a masterly undertaking. The service you have rendered is incalculable. When the time comes we shall know how to thank you more adequately, in the meanwhile you have our very earnest gratitude; and I can only express my sincere regret that the result should be so disastrous for you."

Colonel Grey advanced his hand. To his surprise Lawless refused to take it.

"Disastrous! Yes," he answered. "Letters that are of a nature to lend themselves to blackmailing purposes are not worth the risk of a man's life—and character. I suppose you might argue that I've boasted I hold life cheaply, and you doubtless consider I have no character to lose. Confess now," he added, in response to the other's hastily uttered protest, "that until those letters were safe in your hands you entertained a suspicion that I might misuse them?"

The Colonel sought for words and sought vainly. He was far too ruggedly honest to deny the charge. After a moment or two of silence he tacitly admitted it.

"Most men are liable to mistakes," he said. "And . . . I suppose I was prejudiced."

The man lying back in the easy-chair smiled drily.

"I am so unfortunate as to prejudice most people

unfavourably. A profligate adventurer can scarcely expect to do otherwise."

An almost inaudible sound broke from Zoë Lawless' lips. He did not look at her but continued in the same bitter strain to the pain and embarrassment of both his hearers.

"For every offence of which I've been guilty I've had to pay to the uttermost farthing. On appearance I've been convicted of sins I haven't committed. It's the luck, I suppose, of the man who is marked for failure from the beginning of things."

"I can understand," Colonel Grey said, making ready allowance for his mood, "your resentment of certain injuries. I offer you my frank apologies for the very unworthy suspicions I have entertained. But if I have harboured doubts of you, I have also had moments when I have felt that those doubts were unjustified. I assert, in spite of your morbid imagining, that you more readily inspire confidence than distrust."

"Then how comes it that I failed in inspiring you with confidence?"

"It was probably," Colonel Grey began, and stopped, looking with some pity at the haggard face. "Really, my dear fellow," he said, "is it wise to continue this painful subject?"

"Why not?" The man in the chair sat straighter and pulled himself together with an effort. "I've a fancy somehow," he said, "for having the matter out. . . . You've had a down on me ever since you knew I fought against my own side in the Boer war. It's natural, of course—most people would feel as you do about it. And yet I don't regret it—even now."

"That's an old story," the Colonel said. "Why revive it?"

"I've a feeling I should like to speak of it. I've never explained my motive—no one would understand, or sympathise with it, if I did. In your place, reversing

the circumstances, I should feel as you do about it. But when a man has been kicked out of the Service for cowardice, there's something he owes to himself as well as to his country. I had to prove my nature for my own satisfaction. If they'd given me a chance in the ranks I shouldn't have fought for the Boers. But I had to face the bullets again. . . . I had to disprove for my personal satisfaction that quality of unaccountable fear that forced me to retreat in a dangerous and important crisis. God knows what sudden and uncontrolled impulse governed me on that occasion! . . . I experienced that same cold terror once again when, unarmed, I faced one of my own Tommies with a fixed bayonet in his hand. I can feel the horror of that terror now—the mad and well-nigh uncontrollable impulse to turn my back and run. But the motive that had led me to join the fighting proved stronger than my fear. I went for him with my hands; and the horror left me, as a nightmare terror leaves a sleeper when he wakes. . . . That is the history of this scar on my face."

He paused, pressed his hand to his brow as if weary, and then resumed with a sort of dogged determination to justify himself,—to make these two people, who both in their hearts he knew condemned utterly what he had felt to be a legitimate means of correcting a base tendency before it became confirmed in him as an incorrigible fault, understand in a sense,—see and feel with him. It mattered to him so tremendously, the opinion of these two silent listeners, the one who sat with crossed knees, watching him intently, the other with her troubled eyes downcast, looking upon the ground. And both, he felt, judging him,—condemning him.

"You'll think it at one with the rest, no doubt," he said; "but I don't regret the thing I did which all Englishmen abhor. I know now that I can face death without flinching. I conquered fear. The knowledge

gives me all the satisfaction necessary to qualify the odium of the term traitor. It's not the right way to look at the matter, perhaps ; but that's how it is."

"It's not the right spirit—no!" The Colonel spoke gruffly. "No man is justified in sacrificing honour and duty to his own ends. I recognise that your object was not altogether unworthy. But as a soldier you had no choice."

Mrs. Lawless looked up in silent appeal at the speaker. Then abruptly she rose and stood with her back to the room, facing the window. Lawless rose also. His face was grey, and the skin seemed to have tightened over the bones as it does after a sharp or a long illness. Colonel Grey had seen men look as he did who had fallen on the field ; he had seen them too, lots of them, in hospital.

Lawless put out a hand gropingly. He was tired. He had better get back to bed. It was all finished. He had not succeeded in convincing them. They saw things from a different level ; they couldn't get down to him.

"I daresay you're right," he said uncertainly. "Anyway, it hardly seems to matter. I'm derelict . . . and done for."

Mrs. Lawless turned quickly. He did not see the swift rush of pity that suffused her face, the tears that streamed from her eyes. He was not conscious that she sprang towards him, that it was her arm about him that saved him from falling when, having used up his last reserve of strength in attempting to gain the door, he stumbled over a mat in his progress, and fell forward a collapsed and pitiful object, with drawn and shrunken features, and pallid lips.

The Colonel was at her side in an instant.

"Don't be alarmed," he said. "He's only fainted. We'd better get him back to bed. He ought never to have left it. . . . The folly of it!"

"I ought not to have come," she whispered, sobbing. "You see—I did no good. . . . The sight of me distressed him. I might have guessed. . . ."

She knelt on the floor beside him and pillowed his head on her knee. It gave her infinite pleasure merely to hold him in her arms against the bosom that had hungered for him so long. But oh! the pity of it! to see him reduced, this strong man, to a mere helpless wreck. She drew him closer to her and her tears fell on his face.

"I believe he's dying," she murmured. . . . "And he'll never know how greatly I loved him. . . . Why do we keep these things to ourselves till too late?"

The Colonel rang for assistance. To his infinite relief it was the schoolmaster who came to the door when it opened. In his assumption of authority Mr. Burton seemed a tower of strength. He took in the situation at a glance, and, unaccountably, appeared not in the least surprised. He assumed prompt and resolute command. Between them he and the Colonel got the patient back to his room and into bed. Mr. Burton, anticipating something of the sort when Lawless insisted on dressing, had sent for the doctor, and the medical man arrived very shortly, and standing at the bedside looked with grave dissatisfaction at his patient.

"What's the meaning of this?" he asked concisely.

And Mr. Burton explained.

While they conferred and acted in the sick-room, Mrs. Lawless remained outside the door, listening for any sound from within, her face tense with anxiety, and her eyes tormented. After a while the door opened and the Colonel came forth, and seeing her there took her by the arm and led her back to the sitting-room.

"They'll be some time in there," he said. "You can't stand about waiting. You shall see him before he leaves."

"Was he better?" she asked, not heeding him.

"He'd come round—Yes."

She sat down at a small table, and stretched her arms upon it, and looked at him miserably.

"I have felt all along," she said, "that that would be the end. It's his life, Colonel Grey, that he's given—for a packet of letters. A packet of letters! . . . Oh! dear God!" she cried, and dropped her face on her arms and broke down again and wept.

"And what is his reward?" she flashed suddenly, looking up at him through her tears. "He came to you,—to you—I don't know why, unless it's because you are a soldier and he felt that as a soldier you judged him—full of a human appeal, and you crushed ruthlessly the glimmering hope he cherished of justifying himself. . . . I saw the hope slain in his eyes, heard it die out of his voice. It was the cruellest thing you could have done. You knew, being a soldier, what your judgment meant."

Colonel Grey flushed quickly. He stood before her awkward, hesitating,—accused, judged, condemned, and powerless to defend himself. It was the very devil to be censured with quiet vehemence by a beautiful weeping woman, and be unable to retort. He felt that in a measure he deserved her censure. His conscience was not entirely free from reproach. He had realised the direct appeal in Lawless' attempt at self-justification, had recognised, as he had grudgingly admitted, extenuating circumstances, but if the man had been dying before him he doubted that he could have concealed his disapproval of conduct that no soldier could possibly defend. He sympathised with the man; in many ways he admired him; but the crime of treachery must ever remain a crime in his eyes. It was inexcusable, unjustifiable.

"I think, Mrs. Lawless, that your husband, having

been a soldier himself, will understand what you, perhaps, cannot," he said. "I'm glad he explained as he did; it gave one an insight into the motives that can move a man to commit unworthy and seemingly inexplicable acts. I have both liking and respect for him apart from that grave offence, which I cannot in sincerity condone, though I appreciate his reason as he gave it. He is a brave man guilty of a serious mistake."

"Ah! if we all had to pay so dearly for our mistakes!" she said, and brushed away the tears impatiently as they flowed freely over her cheeks. "But I don't know why I reproach you. I felt once as you feel about it—and I let him see it. That was the beginning of our estrangement. I see things differently now. I see points of honour differently. Human beings can't be classed and judged by a code. It is necessary to make distinctions. The individual has direct and special claims which you men drilled in a system don't understand."

"The judgment of human affairs is beyond human comprehension," Colonel Grey said quietly.

"That is one way of evading responsibility," she replied. "But we women understand these things—the mothers of the race. Even the childless woman is a mother, for the maternal instinct is the birthright of her sex. We mothers realise the needs of the children. Hugh was my child, and I allowed the mother-instinct to be swamped in the pride of the wife. I adopted the Army-system, and judged him by your standard. I wasn't true to my sex. . . . And so we drifted apart. . . . But he never attempted to justify himself to me. I wonder whether, if he had, I should have understood."

He walked across to the window and stood there looking out. He felt distressed and troubled and extremely sorry for this woman in her anxiety with her burden of self-reproach.

"It is so hard," the sorrowful voice went on tearfully,

"to be facing this with the memory of all the years that have been wasted. If I had stood by him in his dark hour . . . "

Further utterance was stopped by the rush of tears that choked her. She dropped her head on her arms again, and for a while the only audible sounds were those made by her bitter weeping.

It was a distinct relief to Colonel Grey when the door opened to admit the doctor. He entered abruptly, closing the door behind him, an undersized, delicate-looking man, with an unattractive manner at variance with a pair of sympathetic eyes. The sympathetic eyes took in the scene rapidly. They were accustomed to scenes, and the sight of a woman's tears failed to embarrass him. He took a chair, drew it up to the table opposite Zoë Lawless, and regarded her attentively as he sat down. She had raised her face at his entrance, and was vainly endeavouring to dry her tears.

"Don't mind me," he said bluntly. "Crying is often a relief. Let it come. You are Mr. Lawless' wife, I understand ? "

She nodded, not trusting her voice, and looked at him appealingly. What was he going to tell her, this man in whose power it lay to pass sentence of death, or hold out hope of life ?

"I understand further that you have had an interview with him which seems to have considerably excited him ? "

"I have seen him. . . . Yes," she faltered, her eyes filling anew. She stretched out a hand to him impulsively. "Tell me how he is," she entreated. "Is he going to die ? "

"I hope not," he answered, but neither the words nor his manner of uttering them greatly reassured her. "He is very ill. You saw that."

She nodded again.

"He'll be worse before he's better. We have to send for trained nurses. The care he is having at present is inadequate."

"I'll nurse him," she cried eagerly, jealously. "Oh! let me nurse him. It is something that I can do."

He looked at her strangely. For a second he hesitated, then he said, very slowly and deliberately, with his grave eyes on her face:

"I'm going to be very unkind; but I'm sure you'll recognise the necessity for my veto when you consider how unfortunate in effect your presence has already been. You must not think of nursing your husband, Mrs. Lawless. You must not, unless he asks for you, enter the room. Sick people have strange fancies," he added in pity for her wrung and suffering face. "It is often necessary to make these unnatural restrictions."

She stared at him with an unspeakable anguish in her eyes.

"They'll call me," she said, "if—— They won't let him die without allowing me to see him?"

"Oh dear! no," he answered quickly. "Of course not—no!"

He rose and held out a sympathetic hand.

"We won't talk of dying yet awhile. He's got a splendid constitution. He ought to pull through. But we won't risk any further excitement. Except for Mr. Burton and the nurses, I don't wish anyone to go into his room. Fresh faces set the mind working, and we must keep him tranquil and composed."

"A very unpleasant duty," he remarked to the Colonel, who accompanied him outside. "I am sorry for the wife; she takes it badly. But in cases of sickness it is the patient we have to consider."

"How's it going with him?" the Colonel asked bluntly.

"At this stage, impossible to say. It will be touch

and go. But as I dislike losing my patients, I never admit the go until the hammer falls."

The Colonel looked after him as he walked away in the sunshine, feeling oddly discouraged, and very disinclined to re-enter the sitting-room. When, bracing himself to face it, he turned the door-handle and went in, he found that Mrs. Lawless had dried her eyes, and was sitting very quiet and entirely composed, looking out of the window.

XXX

WHO shall tell of the moods and feelings, the alternating between hope and despair, that govern the mind of the looker-on at the conflict between life and death about the bed of one who is dear ; the futility of tears, of intercession ; the long drawn agony of suspense ? Day by day, hourly almost, the mood varies, hope fluctuates, till finally depression settles upon the spirit, crushes it, reduces it to a state of dull acquiescence in the inevitable ordering of things.

Had Zoë Lawless been permitted to take an active part in the nursing the suspense would have told on her less, but it was almost beyond endurance to be denied all access to the room where the man she loved, and had so little understood, lay for the greater part of the time delirious, yielding up his life without a struggle for it, owning himself beaten,—done.

Mr. Burton gave her frequent bulletins, sometimes hopeful, sometimes, despite his utmost endeavour to appear sanguine before her, depressed. The final issue had become to him also a matter of tremendous importance. He had a very warm regard for this man of striking personality, who had come into his quiet monotonous life and drawn him as a protagonist into the midst of startling and unusual events. And he was profoundly sorry for the beautiful woman who was his wife, and yet appeared to have no place nor share in his life. Mr. Burton, knowing nothing of the circumstances surrounding the lives of these two, refrained from

criticising either. He formed his liking impartially, and reserved judgment.

Every morning Mrs. Lawless accompanied him part of the way to the school, and sometimes in the evening she would meet him coming home. He was the only human being to whom she could talk unreservedly. Colonel Grey had gone back to the coast after having arranged for a daily bulletin. He told Mr. Burton to telegraph for him if his presence was needed, and this Mr. Burton also undertook to do, supposing him to mean in the event of a fatal termination.

The days passed ; they grew warmer ; but Lawless made no progress towards recovery.

"He is not going to get well," Zoë said with conviction one morning to the doctor when she interviewed him after he left the sick-room.

The doctor looked nonplussed.

"He makes no fight," he answered, as though puzzled to account for this ready giving in. Then he added, with one of his rare attempts at encouragement : "But he is still with us."

The hope thus sparingly dealt out was not sufficiently convincing to reassure her. She felt that the sand in the glass was running low. If only she might be allowed to sit beside him, to touch him ! . . . She feared that he might slip from her in his sleep perhaps, and that she might not know in time.

"You'll call me—you'll be sure to call me," she said to the nurses continually, "if there's any change for the worse ?"

And one morning the call came. She was in bed when the nurse tapped at the door. She did not stay to dress herself, but slipping on a loose wrapper, pinned her hair up carelessly, and hurried to the sick-room. The doctor had been sent for but had not yet arrived. Both nurses were in the room. The night-nurse, who was

only then relieved, remained to be of assistance. Lawless had been violently sick. He now lay back on the pillow exhausted with closed eyes, breathing so slightly that he scarcely seemed to breathe at all. He had all the appearance of a man who is rapidly sinking.

"Is it the end?" Zoë whispered to one of the nurses in an awestruck voice.

"I'm afraid so," the woman answered, and placed a chair for her beside the bed.

She sank into it, and leaning forward looked fearfully at the quiet figure, the closed eyes, the pinched grey features. Almost she could fancy that he was dead already. She took one of the listless hands. It lay in hers limply, without response, without sense of feeling. She drew it to her and kissed it. Then she laid her head upon the pillow beside his and drew his face to hers, and held it pressed close against her cheek.

And so the doctor found her when he entered with her jealous arms clasping the inert figure, satisfying their long starvation of denial by contact, and with the glowing beauty of her warm rounded cheek resting against the shrunken colourless face on the pillow that had given no sign of life or movement since her entry. The doctor leant over the bed. He placed a quiet hand upon her shoulder to prevent her moving, and bending low looked intently into the still face.

"He is asleep," he said, and straightened himself and moved noiselessly away.

And Zoë Lawless remained where she was, undisturbed by everything and everyone about her, as oblivious as the sick man of external things. She was beyond thinking of the issues. She had ceased to wonder whether this crisis in his illness which meant the turning-point one way or the other would decide in his favour or not. He was hers. That was all that mattered then. Whether it were life or death that

claimed him, it had given him to her. In the detachment of the moment that was the only thing that held any reality for her. She had got outside of life for a time. The things that went on in the world did not concern her; she had drawn apart from it all to a remote distance and was happy in her isolation with the body of her love.

All that day Lawless lay in the same comatose condition. It was impossible to say when he slept and when he was awake. He never appeared entirely conscious. At intervals the nurse gave him nourishment or a dose of medicine. She did not disturb Mrs. Lawless, save at meal times to insist on her leaving the room in quest of food. Zoë went reluctantly, and wandered back after a brief absence, and took her place as before. Whether she had eaten in the interval was problematical ; but the change and movement were a relief.

She stayed with him until nine o'clock that night. When she left he was sleeping soundly and comfortably ; and, white and weary but extraordinarily happy, she went to bed and fell promptly into a deep and dreamless sleep.

And the next day the bedroom door was closed against her again. He was better. He was fully conscious, but he made no demand to see her ; and in compliance with the doctor's wishes she remained outside.

"Yesterday was the crisis," he said to her. "He's turned the corner. He isn't out of the wood, but if there are no excitements he ought to pull through."

She smiled when he unnecessarily cautioned her to keep out of sight. She was not at all likely to prejudice her husband's chances of recovery, even though she never saw him again.

Her chief pleasure during the next few days was in listening to Mr. Burton's scraps of information concerning the wonderful doings and sayings of the invalid on the occasions when he went, as he usually did twice

a day, into the sick-room. Even the accounts of the nourishment he took were absorbingly interesting.

Mr. Burton came out of the bedroom one morning laughing, and, accompanied by Zoë, set out for his work. She looked at him wistfully as they left the hotel together. The smile still lingered in his eyes when they were out upon the road.

"I am all impatience," she said, "to hear what amuses you. Was it something—Hugh said?"

"He called me a fool," Mr. Burton said, and chuckled,—"a very pronounced fool." He had, as a matter of fact, called him a damned fool, but Mr. Burton could not bring himself to use such an expression before a woman. "That shows a very decided improvement. I think if there had been anything handy he would have thrown it. Impatience is a healthy sign."

"Oh!" she said, and the tears welled in her eyes so that she turned aside her face to hide them. "If you only knew how jealous I feel—of you!"

And on another occasion she asked him:

"Does he never mention me?"

"No," Mr. Burton answered with obvious reluctance. "You must remember," he added in a kindly desire to soften the negative, "that since he saw you he has been so very ill that probably what happened before has been entirely wiped out. It is possible that he has forgotten seeing you, that he does not know you are here."

That day she gathered a great bunch of wild flowers, and arranged them in a vase, and asked him to carry them to the sick-room.

"Say that a lady staying at the hotel sent them to him," she said.

He did her bidding. He carried the vase into the bedroom and placed it on the dressing-table where the tired eyes could rest on it without effort.

"Bloemetjes," he explained, and smiled at the patient.

"Ah!" Lawless smiled too. "Been botanising, have you? And I benefit by the fruits of your labour. It's kind of you to remember a poor devil who can't even crawl out into the sunshine. It's precious dull work lying here, Burton. I don't know what I should do if it wasn't for your visits—cut my throat, if they'd give me a chance."

"Oh! you grow better now with every day," Mr. Burton answered cheerfully. "Discontent is a proof of convalescence. You'll soon be able to do your own botanising. By the way, I don't wish to appropriate thanks that are not due to me. I had nothing to do with the gathering of those flowers. A lady staying in the hotel sent them to you."

Lawless made no immediate response. His weary, fretful gaze sought the flowers, rested upon them a moment, and then turned deliberately away.

"Very kind of her," he answered briefly, and was careful not to refer to the subject again.

Mr. Burton regretted that he had no more expansive message of appreciation to carry away with him. But Mrs. Lawless did not appear disappointed. She had not expected more. His want of curiosity as to the identity of the sender of the flowers told her what she desired to know. He was fully aware that she was staying in the hotel.

The next day she gathered fresh flowers, and Mr. Burton carried them in as before. On this occasion the recipient made no remark; so far as Mr. Burton saw he did not even look at them.

The little man carried away a sorely troubled heart. After his simple fashion he had grown fond of Zoë Lawless. It was a real delight to him to bear her any small crumb of comfort, to have to go to her empty-

handed distressed him beyond measure. She shook her head at sight of his serious face and smiled faintly. She could always judge the nature of the news he brought before he imparted it by the gravity or gladness of his look. To-day it was very grave, and since the patient's condition no longer called for serious anxiety, she knew her offering had not been well received.

"He snubbed my poor little gift," she said.

And he wondered how she had divined it, and sought, as he always did when he believed she was feeling hurt, to offer consolation.

"He's rather peevish to-day," he explained excusingly. "He gets weary of lying there with nothing to do, and it makes him irritable. Not that he said anything unkind about the flowers. . . . He—he didn't appear to notice them."

She nodded.

"I know," she said.

That day the doctor removed his veto.

"There is no reason why you shouldn't visit your husband now, Mrs. Lawless," he informed her, "if you are careful not to excite him, nor stay long in the room."

She looked at him for a while thoughtfully, and a soft rose crept into her cheeks.

"Since he is so far recovered," she answered quietly, "I think I will not risk retarding his progress—unless he asks for me."

On the following day she gathered her flowers as before, and sent them by her trusty messenger.

"He has got to look at them this morning," she announced as she gave them into his hands. "Take them to the bedside, and just say, 'Zoë sends them.'"

Mr. Burton quite blushed at the idea of taking such a liberty with her name; but he seized the flowers and departed hastily upon his errand, with many misgivings

as to the reception that would be accorded him when he presented this remarkable message to the invalid.

When he entered the bedroom the nurse withdrew. She usually did, but he had never appreciated the tact of the proceeding as he did on that particular morning. Lawless was resting propped up against a quantity of pillows. He was colourless and wretchedly thin in face, but the improvement in his appearance was already very marked. He gained ground daily now.

He smiled his welcome when Mr. Burton entered, but when his glance fell on the bunch of bloemetjes he frowned.

"I wish you didn't bring that litter with you every morning," he complained.

Mr. Burton, remembering his instructions, walked deliberately to the bedside and laid his offering on the pillow.

"Zoë sent them," he explained.

Lawless stared at him, and the blood mounted slowly to his hollow cheeks.

"The devil!" he muttered.

Then suddenly a wave of angry emotion swept over him. He seized the flowers in both hands, and flung them with all his feeble strength at the surprised, concerned little man, who jumped aside to dodge the missile as though it were a bomb.

"I was afraid you would resent the familiarity," he said apologetically. "But she told me to use her name."

"Oh! go to blazes!" Lawless muttered, already ashamed of the outburst. "What does it matter what you call her? . . . Take back those bloemetjes to her, you old idiot, and tell her that until her consideration moves her to make her inquiries and offerings in person they have no interest for me."

Mr. Burton gathered up the strewn, rejected gift.

"She has got my white Flower of Innocence here, I see," he remarked, and smiled with pleasure at sight of the bloom.

Lawless was lying with his face turned away, staring out of the window.

"You can leave that with me," he said quietly,—
"as being appropriate."

Mr. Burton carried the disordered bunch of flowers back to the giver with a beaming countenance.

"He flung them at me," he explained delightedly.

Mrs. Lawless looked hurt. The little man's pleasure in the scorn of her gift appeared to her unkind.

"He kept back one bloom—a white one. But so long as you choose an emissary to convey your gift, he is not interested in it, he says."

She looked at him in silence for a moment, her face flushing and paling in turns. Then she went close to him, took the despised flowers from him and rearranged them carefully. She put a flower in his coat, and drawing back surveyed the effect and him with a tender, affectionate smile.

"That is because this morning I shall not accompany you," she said.

"No," he answered musingly, and looked at her attentively over the tops of his glasses. "I suppose you won't. I shall miss you; but I shall not be lonely because I carry with me the glad heart."

XXXI

THE greatest situations in life are invariably incomplete, inexorably limited by the very stress of feeling that should make them effective and convincing, as, for instance, it does on the stage, where effect is duly studied and considered irrespective of the sensitiveness of the human mind that shrinks from making a display of its deeper emotions.

Because of the intensity of their feeling and the natural reserve that prompted them to its concealment, the meeting between husband and wife was commonplace in the extreme. For years they had been apart, nursing resentment one against the other. Each had failed the other in the great essentials of married life. Both had made mistakes, and both had been unrelenting. But death makes an extraordinary difference in human affairs, even when it is merely the overshadowing of death's wings, which, hovering for a while, pass on, the time being not yet fulfilled.

The fear, the almost certainty that death would claim her husband had melted for ever the hardness in Zoë Lawless' heart. She was prepared, had been prepared from the moment she determined to leave Cape Town in search of him, to forgive every injury that she had suffered at his hands,—to accept him as he was for her love's sake, unconditionally, as he had once told her was the only way possible to complete reconciliation. He had less to forgive; but he also had come to regard life differently since he had stood on the borderland of the Great Eternal,—to realise

its limitations and insufficiencies, the pettiness of ill-feeling, the seriousness of the huge human blunder that is called unkindness. The overshadowing of death's wings had softened him, had given him pause to think.

When the door opened in response to his querulously uttered invitation, and Zoë entered with her flowers in her hand, he looked towards her with a quick, sharp glance of inquiry. Behind the look was a certain fierce shyness, a diffidence which he strove to conceal. She approached the bed, placed the bloemetjes on the coverlet close to his hand and sat down in the chair she had occupied on the only other occasion that she had been permitted inside the room.

"I am so glad you are better," she said.

He removed his gaze from her face and played with the flowers.

"You've been long enough in coming to see me," he returned ungraciously.

"The doctor was afraid I might excite you," she explained.

"Rot!" he ejaculated.

He pulled the flowers about and did not look at her.

"It's been a near thing with me," he went on. "I've had a closer look at death than I'm likely to get again, and come through. . . . It didn't seem to matter, somehow." He still played with the flowers. "It would have squared things, perhaps, if I'd made you a widow."

She leant towards him, and spoke in a low voice, reproachfully.

"You know it wouldn't have squared things. It would have deprived both of us of the chance to make amends."

"Still making a matter of conscience of it?" he said cynically.

She put her hand quickly on his, and so stayed the restless fingers in their destructive task.

"Hugh! That isn't kind."

"No," he agreed. "But you see, it's easy for you to do the right thing under given circumstances."

"Oh! my dear!" she said. And then: "Easy! If you knew what it cost me to reconcile myself to the thought of sharing in nursing you with that woman. . . . I was prepared to do that. Oh yes! I know the rights of that story now, but I didn't when I left Cape Town."

Lawless flushed darkly.

"I don't deserve that you should come near me, Zoë. . . . I behaved to you like a cad."

"You didn't behave well," she returned. "I wonder why you acted as you did. When Colonel Grey told me the story, I felt that you must hate me to let me think that. . . . It made me bitter. Afterwards, when death came so very close, such matters appeared less important, trivial even. . . . I ceased to think of them."

"It makes a difference," he said.

His hand twisted under hers until the palm came uppermost; his fingers closed upon her fingers, gripping them tightly. A little thrill of happiness ran through her. It was many a long year since his hand had gripped hers like that. He turned his face suddenly and looked at her.

"You are cold," he complained, but his eyes smiled with a look of complete satisfaction. "You punish me by staying out of my room altogether until I become violent, commit an assault on a very harmless person, and practically send for you. And now you are here—you permit me to hold your hand."

She laughed and flushed warmly.

"I'm leaving it all to you," she said softly. "I want to leave it to you. . . . You ought to understand."

"When I was sick," he said whimsically, "I suffered from delusions. The most amazing as well as the pleasantest of these fancies was that one day you came

and sat beside my bed where you are sitting now, only, inexplicably, your arms were about me, and your face was close to mine upon the pillow. I was out of my body then. I think I should have slipped away altogether but for those restraining arms. I've lain often and tried to will the vision back, but it never reappeared."

He turned in the bed and lifted himself slightly on his elbow.

"You are far more elusive than that fancy of mine," he grumbled.

He gripped the hand he held tighter, and pulled her towards him.

"I thought you weren't conscious," she said, stooping lower. "I didn't guess you knew. . . ."

"Zoë! my dear! my dear!" he cried, his face close to hers. "All these years without you! . . . How have I borne it? I have been a wanderer on the face of the earth,—a rudderless ship that has drifted with the current, that has had no helm to answer to, no one on the look-out. I wonder that I didn't go aground a dozen times. I should have got aground if there had not been the flame of my love for you alight in my heart to show me the danger places when I came to them. You have been my guiding star throughout the years. I never thought that we should meet, much less come together again; but I've always borne your goodness, your purity, in mind as things that counted, that kept a man from breaking himself on the reckless impulses of his own selfishness. I've been a limited, carnal-minded cad. But whatever brief passion has possessed me, I have never loved anyone but you. Zoë, I hate myself when I think of the past. I want to get away and hide myself—from you."

"Don't think of it," she said soothingly. "We've done with all that."

He looked at her wonderingly.

"What made you follow me out here?" he asked. "What brought you to this place, believing what you believed of me? . . . It puzzles me to understand."

She put out her other hand and laid it upon his shoulder and pushed him gently but firmly back upon the pillow.

"Why trouble about understanding?" she asked. "I don't understand myself. It was just love drew me." She spoke lower. "Whatever you have done, whatever you have been, I have never ceased to love you."

He turned his face aside weakly. There were tears in his eyes. He endeavoured unsuccessfully to hide them from her. She put her arms about him, and gathered the shrunken, suffering figure to her bosom. Then she laid her head beside his on the pillow and drew his face close to hers. . . .

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